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**The meaning of geopolitical space
the importance of Eurasia for Russia and Turkey**

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The Meaning of Geopolitical Space: The Importance of Eurasia for Russia and Turkey

David Svarin

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the Department of War Studies, King's College London

Abstract

The aim of this PhD project is to conduct a critical geopolitical analysis of the meaning of Eurasia for Russia and Turkey. More generally, it focuses on the importance of 'space' and the geographical situation of a country in the formulation of its foreign policy. This project has two aims. First, it aims to depict the place of Eurasia in Russia's and Turkey's foreign policy outlook in terms of their regional and geographical orientation. More generally, it is interested in Russian and Turkish self-perception of their place in the international system. On a second level, this project is interested in the concept of 'geopolitical space' and the way in which geographical and geopolitical imaginations influence Russian and Turkish foreign policy. This thesis treats geography not only as a fixed entity but also as a discursive practice. Hence, governing elites, policy makers and other actors attach meaning to geographical space through discourse. With regard to foreign policy practice, the geopolitical imagination and personal interpretations of geographical realities by governing elites play a crucial role. Given these considerations, this thesis is grounded in a critical geopolitical understanding of international relations.

This thesis studies the meaning of Eurasia for Russia and Turkey and its place in their respective foreign policy. It does so via an analysis of the two countries' government discourse, that is all public speech acts such as interviews and political speeches. Notions of national identity, geopolitical imagination and how they influence foreign policy are thus at the core of this research project. This thesis postulates that Eurasia emerged as a new object of study following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, because this major historical event and the disappearance of the most important Eurasian empire freed up the interpretative space for new discussions about the meaning of Eurasia. This applies to the case of Russia and Turkey, where Eurasia occupies an important position, while there obviously are diverging interpretations and historical conceptions of Eurasia in the Russian and Turkish contexts. The main argument is that the concept of Eurasia is a central feature in Russian and Turkish government discourse. It is also an instrumental concept in that it allows the attribution of different characteristics to Russian and Turkish foreign policy. As such, Eurasia functions as an important zone for Russia's and Turkey's economic development, their political power or role as powerful and influential players in the international system.

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Abbreviations

AKP	Justice and Development Party (<i>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi</i>)
AoC	Alliance of Civilisations
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEM	Asia-Europe Meeting
BSEC	Black Sea Economic Cooperation
BTC	Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CSCP	Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organisation
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union (<i>Russian use</i>)
ECO	Economic Cooperation Organisation
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EU	European Union
EurAsEc	Eurasian Economic Community
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MGIMO	Moscow State Institute of International Relations
MHP	Nationalist Movement Party (<i>Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi</i>)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OBOR	One Belt, One Road Initiative
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
START	Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
TANAP	Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline
TBMM	Grand National Assembly of Turkey (<i>Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi</i>)
TIKA	Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USAK	International Strategic Research Organisation

Chapter 1: Introduction

The aim of this PhD project is to conduct a critical geopolitical analysis of the meaning of Eurasia for Russia and Turkey. More generally, it focuses on the importance of ‘space’ and the geographical situation of a country in the formulation of its foreign policy. This project has two aims. First, it aims to depict the place of Eurasia in Russia’s and Turkey’s foreign policy outlook in terms of their regional and geographical orientation. More generally, it is interested in Russian and Turkish self-perception of their place in the international system. On a second level, this project is interested in the concept of ‘geopolitical space’ and the way in which geographical and geopolitical imaginations influence Russian and Turkish foreign policy.

At the centre of this thesis is the study of the meaning of Eurasia for Russia and Turkey and its place in their respective foreign policy. It does so via an analysis of the two countries’ government discourse, that is public speech acts such as interviews and political speeches. Notions of national identity, geopolitical imagination and how they influence foreign policy are thus at the core of this research project. These notions are arranged in a triangular relationship with reciprocal influence. This means that the geopolitical imagination of a country’s elite influences foreign policy, while national identity considerations equally have an impact on the formulation of foreign policy. At the same time, external events and political developments impact the elite’s perception of their country’s national identity and thus also potentially changes their geopolitical imagination. All this is linked to geographical space and Russia’s and Turkey’s interpretation of the geographical reality they inhabit.

This thesis treats geography not as a deterministic entity, but as a discursive practice. Methodologically, it employs a discourse analysis studying speeches and interviews by the principal political actors of both countries. Speaking about and formulating the meaning of geographical entities is an inherently geopolitical practice. Hence, governing elites, policy makers and other actors attach meaning to geographical space through discourse. This thesis follows Starr’s argument that ‘geography is “dynamic” in that the meaning of space, distance, territory, and borders can change in the

perceptions of peoples and foreign policy-making elites'.¹ With regard to foreign policy practice, the geopolitical imagination and personal interpretations of geographical realities by governing elites play a crucial role. Given these considerations, this thesis is grounded in a critical geopolitical understanding of international relations, focusing on notions of identity and discourse and how 'global space is incessantly reimagined and rewritten by centers of power and authority'.²

This thesis focuses on the geopolitical concept of Eurasia and the way in which the Turkish and Russian governing elites attribute meaning and value to it. Russia and Turkey inhabit regional environments which influence their national interests and foreign policy orientation. However, the way in which the respective governing elites of these two countries make sense and interpret this regional environment plays a crucial role in their countries' foreign policy orientation. Hence, foreign policy is influenced by national identity considerations combined with foreign policy objectives derived from national interests and the geopolitical imaginations of various actors. Gerald Toal (O Tuathail) refers to this as a state's geopolitical culture, defining the concept as follows: '[geopolitical culture] can be defined as the prevailing sense of identity, place, and mission in the world [...]. A geopolitical culture is, first and foremost, about the identity of a territorial entity and the locational narrative it presents to itself and the world'.³ The central idea here is the absence of a deterministic framework which intrinsically links a country's foreign policy and geopolitical imagination to its geographical location. Although certain premises vary according to factors including a country's geographical location or the nature of neighbouring countries, the much more important issue is the way in which any given state interprets these circumstances. In short, the main idea is perfectly summed up by Toal: 'There is no objective relationship between the geographic location of a territorial entity and its geopolitical culture. Geography as earthly location and resource endowment is what states make of it'.⁴

¹ Starr 2013: 439

² O Tuathail 1996: 249

³ Toal 2017: 39

⁴ Toal 2017: 40

1.1 Scope and purpose of research

At the centre of this thesis is the concept of Eurasia and its meaning for Russia and Turkey. Eurasia is a contested geopolitical concept, not only for Russia and Turkey, and thus serves as the ideal space for doing a discourse analysis. As such, Eurasia always occupied an important position when it came to geopolitics in that it was the key aspect of several geopolitical theories (for example, Mackinder's heartland theory). In general, as this thesis will argue, Eurasia is a contested term and geopolitical concept to which many different meanings are attached. There is no single definition of what Eurasia constitutes. Still, at the centre of the vast Eurasian landmass, with part of their country in both Europe and Asia, lie Russia and Turkey. Put differently, Russia and Turkey are the quintessential Eurasian countries.

At the outset, my research was guided by concerns with the meaning and importance of geography for the definition of a country's national identity and the way in which geography influences foreign policy. More generally, the focus lay on an attempt to conceptualise the meaning of geographical regions and geopolitical spaces in the context of international relations as a social practice, where ideas and identities matter. My purpose broadly is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the nuances of Russia's and Turkey's geopolitical discourses and imaginaries. Furthermore, through the uncovering of these structures of meaning within the Russian and Turkish foreign policy elite, I aim to analyse the way in which they impact on political practice. Specifically with regard to Eurasia it aims to highlight the plasticity of this geopolitical space in Russian and Turkish discourse and uncover the plethora of meanings, themes, actors and feelings attached to it. However, Eurasia is not a hegemonic discourse and other geopolitical discourses exist in Russia and Turkey.

The essence of this thesis is thus concerned with analysing the place and relevance of Eurasia in Russian and Turkish foreign policy elite discourse. The findings of my research will be of interest not only for the academic community, but particularly for policy-making circles. Especially from a Western and European perspective, Russia and Turkey are important states being both European but also at the margins of Europe. The way in which these states see and interpret the Eurasian region has obvious implications for Western policy in this space. Although Eurasia is a frequent reference

in general writings, it means a plethora of things. While this thesis will argue that this is precisely the nature of the space of Eurasia as well as its advantage, with regard to policy-making, conceptual clarity is required. This thesis will form a small contribution to inform the interested reader with an in-depth analysis of the meaning of Eurasia, its place in Russian and Turkish geopolitical imagination and foreign policy practice.

1.1.1 Case studies: Russia and Turkey

The rationale for selecting Russia and Turkey as case studies is based on several shared characteristics: first, their geographical location at the intersection of Europe and Asia with parts of their territory on both continents, makes them the only truly Eurasian countries. Second, a similar historical experience stems from their position as the power centres of large, contiguous land-based empires for many centuries, and thus a post-imperial identity influences their foreign policy. Having inhabited the space of Eurasia for many centuries, which led to the creation of sustained political, cultural and linguistic links as well as economic and security-related interests across this space, Eurasia occupies an important place in the practice of Russian and Turkish foreign policy. Furthermore, Russia and Turkey are interesting case studies because of the prevalence of geopolitics in these two cases in the context of the (re-)emergence of geopolitics in Europe and ‘foreign policy identity crises’ as a result of the end of the Cold War.⁵ Hence, a critical theoretical framework is useful in enhancing our understanding of contemporary Russian and Turkish foreign policy.

Geopolitical thinking became widespread among Russian intellectuals and the foreign policy elite following the dissolution of the Soviet Union because it offered simple ways out of the conundrum of defining a new sense for Russia’s being.⁶ In general, the question of ‘where Russia belongs’ and how it should be defined, which in turn prompts the question of where it should orient its foreign policy, received much attention.⁷ Geography strongly influences Turkish foreign policy due to Turkey’s strategic location at the intersection of continents. This results in the prevalence of

⁵ See Guzzini 2012 and the chapters on Russia (Astrov and Morozova 2012) and Turkey (Bilgin 2012) respectively.

⁶ Kerr 1995; Smith 1999; Kolossov and Turkovsky 2001; Tsygankov 2003

⁷ Light 2003; Tsygankov 2007

geopolitical images among Turkey's elite.⁸ The thinking of Turkish foreign minister and prime minister Davutoğlu, for instance, was influenced by traditional geopolitics and he often referred to some of these concepts in his writings.⁹ Based on Turkey's geographical realities and following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the opening-up of this space to outside actors, focusing on Turkey's Eurasian discourse has become relevant again.

1.1.2 Discourse analysis

Being interested in the place of Eurasia in Russia's and Turkey's geopolitical imagination, or more precisely, the geopolitical imaginations of the two countries' governing elite, the object of study of this thesis is elite discourse. Focusing on the official view and representation of Eurasia in Russian and Turkish foreign policy, I concentrate on a select number of government officials and representatives, or put differently, people authorised to speak on behalf of the country. Their geopolitical imagination and the structures of their public discourse are thus at the centre of this research, which focuses on public texts and speeches. Hence, the methodological foundation of this thesis is discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis can be done in a number of different ways and there is no single definition of what a discourse is. Put briefly, 'discourses are systems of meaning-production that fix meaning, however temporarily, and enable actors to make sense of the world and to act within it'.¹⁰ The main contribution of discourse analysis is thus the uncovering of structures of meaning, in this case the importance of Eurasia in Russian and Turkish foreign policy. As a result, a large number of speech acts by Russian and Turkish government officials over a time period of roughly fifteen years (ranging from 2000 to 2015 for Russia and from 2002 to 2015 for Turkey) have been collected. Using a methodological framework, this thesis intended to distil the various meanings and characteristics of the concept of Eurasia in Russian and Turkish foreign policy discourse. In addition, the discourse analysis has been combined with a chronological discussion focusing on major political developments, thus describing

⁸ Bilgin 2007, 2012; Yanik 2009; Larrabee 2010

⁹ Erşen 2014b; Ozkan 2014

¹⁰ Dunn and Neumann 2016: 4

the context in which the discourse operates and the way in which this context influences both discourse and policy.

1.2 Research questions

Below are outlined the questions which were guiding this research from the outset and helped formulate the analytical framework for the subsequent discourse analysis.

What does Eurasia mean for Russia and Turkey? Russia and Turkey are the quintessential countries inhabiting the ‘geopolitical space’ of Eurasia. It is therefore assumed that both countries consider Eurasia to be of particular importance for their foreign policy, geopolitical imagination, national interests and political and economic development. In order to answer this question, this thesis relies upon a comprehensive discourse analysis of speech acts by Russia’s and Turkey’s governing elite. It focuses on several general themes such as geography, history, culture and the economy, which are central for Russian and Turkish conceptions of Eurasia.

How important is their country’s ‘Eurasianess’ for Russia/Turkey? This thesis sets out to determine the degree to which the geopolitical space of Eurasia and their country’s Eurasian identity matters for Russia and Turkey. In so doing, it also takes into account other identities in Russia and Turkey, especially their traditionally strong European orientation. Furthermore, it investigates the centrality of Eurasia in Russian and Turkish foreign policy and how it influences their respective worldview and foreign policy options.

Do Russia/Turkey see themselves at the centre of Eurasia? This question alludes to the way in which Moscow and Ankara perceive their respective role and position within Eurasia. The notion of centrality is an important one in that it helps explore the predominant geopolitical vision in both countries. In addition, it analyses which role conceptions are at the centre of Russian and Turkish government discourse. For instance, it illustrates whether Russia sees Eurasia primarily as a place where Russian power is grounded, whether Turkey’s vision of Eurasia leads to a particular role for the country in global affairs, or whether the importance of Eurasia lies particularly in the political and economic opportunities it offers Russia and Turkey.

1.3 Main findings

At the centre of this thesis is the discourse of Russia's and Turkey's political elite, their geopolitical imagination and the way in which these elites attribute meaning to the geopolitical space of Eurasia. The concept of Eurasia is a heterogeneous concept with a variety of meanings. As this thesis argues, Eurasia is not just a philosophical or ideological construction, but also a pragmatic political and economic concept. What is more, one of the key analytical values of the concept of Eurasia is its flexible character and the fact that it is defined in different ways by different countries depending on their respective historical, political and economic experiences. In general, this thesis postulates that Eurasia emerged as a new object of study following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, because this major historical event and the disappearance of the most important Eurasian empire freed up the interpretative space for new discussions about the meaning of Eurasia. This applies particularly to the case of Russia, where Eurasia and Eurasianism are historically rooted, but also to Turkey, where Eurasia emerged as a new political and geographical reality in the 1990s.

In Russia, for instance, there is a long philosophical tradition of Eurasianist thought going back to the early 20th century, which experienced a revival in the post-Soviet period, thus receiving much scholarly and political attention. In terms of concrete political ideas, the Russian government has been active in recent years in implementing a new regional integration project in Eurasia with the idea of fostering a new greater Eurasian space. The concept of Eurasia in Turkey does not rely on a similar philosophical tradition, but discussions about Turkey's Eurasian character have been ongoing since the 1990s. Following the rise to power of Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP), the definition of Eurasia was enlarged and a new civilisational focus was developed. In general, Eurasia also functions as a pragmatic concept in Russia and Turkey, where the focus lies on national interests, security considerations and economic opportunities.

Based on an in-depth analysis of Russian government elite discourse on Eurasia over the years 2000 to 2015, this thesis argues that the geopolitical concept of Eurasia is a central element in Russian foreign policy. Geographical images, such as Russia's geographic location as well as the country's size, placing Russia right at the centre of

Eurasia, are at the core of the elite discourse. More importantly, discourse analysis reveals that Russia's centrality in the Eurasian geography serves as the foundation for its position as a great power in global affairs. This geographical focus is coupled with a strong emphasis on Russia's historical experience, namely the role Russia played as the imperial centre of subsequent regional and global empires. It is understood that this has implications to the present day. Indeed, Eurasia is the region in which Russia's imperial past is grounded and the concomitant connections with other countries in this space are an important element in Russian foreign policy. For instance, frequent references by Russia's governing elite to the existence of a historic community in Eurasia illustrate the importance of this region for Russia's economic and political development. Eurasia is thus seen as an important part of Russia's identity. However, it is important to note that identity considerations are not the most important element of Russian elite discourse on Eurasia. Eurasia is certainly part of Russian identity, but not the only one. There is a constant emphasis in the governing elite's discourse on Russia having a dual or multiple identity, consisting of European, Asian and Eurasian traits. Furthermore, the economy and economic integration in Eurasia, are a crucial component of Russian government elite discourse, in that Eurasia occupies an important place as a synonym for regional integration. With the implementation of the Eurasian Economic Union, Russia being its principal promoter, Eurasia has developed into a distinct region in global affairs. Given Russia's dominant position in this setting and its role as the driving force behind Eurasian integration, its position as an important and influential global actor is secured.

The analysis of Turkey's governing elite's discourse over the years 2002 to 2015 reveals that geography is the dominant theme in Turkish government discourse on Eurasia. The key factors here are Turkey's geographic location at the intersection of different continents, its concomitant belonging to both Europe and Asia and, as a consequence of these two factors, its centrality in the Eurasian, or according to Ahmet Davutoğlu, Afro-Eurasian region. Various exponents of Turkey's governing elite evoked geopolitical images, such as Turkey as a central country and Turkey as a bridge, and they have become fixed notions in Turkish conceptions of Eurasia. Furthermore, references to Turkey's historical experience as a regional empire and the ensuing cultural and ethnic links across the former Ottoman imperial territories and the vast Eurasian region, can be considered foundations of Turkey's role in Eurasia.

For instance, these historical links are highlighted when Turkish officials emphasise the importance of Eurasia and especially of the countries in Central Asia for Turkish foreign policy. What becomes clear is that Turkey does not consider Eurasia to be a defining trait in terms of its national identity. In general, Turkey's identity oscillated between multiple identities such as European, Eurasian, but also Middle Eastern. However, over the years, and in particular due to the increasing influence of Ahmet Davutoğlu, this multiple identity evolved into one dominant identity, namely that of Turkey as a Afro-Eurasian country. What this meant in terms of policy was an increased focus on Turkey's regional environment and its historical Ottoman territories while emphasising the country's geographical uniqueness as a defining feature. Lastly, economic considerations, and above all the central element of energy, are substantial parts of Turkey's Eurasian discourse. The goal of Turkey's energy policy is to develop the country into an energy hub connecting the East and West. This, of course, is linked to the country's geographical situation and its position as a connecting link at the centre of Eurasia.

In addition to these general themes (geography, history/culture and economy/integration) in Russian and Turkish discourse on Eurasia, this thesis highlights four notions – power, role, identity and opportunity – which are central to understanding the place of Eurasia in the geopolitical imagination of Russia's and Turkey's governing elite. However, there is a hierarchy in that the notions of role and power are most central to Russia's and Turkey's Eurasian discourse.

One of the fundamental principles of Russian foreign policy and the Russian political elite's understanding of their country is Russia's position as one of the great powers and an influential and important pole in a multipolar global order. This means that the concept of Eurasia in turn occupies a central position in the conception of Russia's role in the international system in the sense that Russia's power is grounded in its role as the centre of gravity and hegemon in the Eurasian region. This is also concretely manifested in the Eurasian integration project in that it institutionalises Russia's power in Eurasia, while linking it permanently to other states in this geopolitical space. Russia's governing elite characterises the international system as being multipolar with ongoing competition between different geopolitical zones. This view was reinforced following the Ukraine crisis and the growing friction in relations between

Russia and the West. In this context, Eurasia is seen as one of the geopolitical zones which stands in competition to other regions. Given that Russia considers itself to be the dominant power in Eurasia, Eurasia is thus directly related to Russia's role as a global great power. What is more, Russia's political survival and relevance in global affairs depends on its role as the leader of Eurasia, as Putin argued in his inauguration speech as president in 2012: 'We must all understand that the life of our future generations and our prospects as a country and nation depend on our ability to become a leader and centre of gravity for the whole of Eurasia'.¹¹ This also demonstrates that in the context of the increasing tensions between East and West, which culminated in the Ukraine crisis, the governing elite's discourse on Eurasia was principally oriented towards the West. Especially the discourse on Eurasian integration painted an image of Russia as an indispensable part of Europe's development and an ideal link between Europe and Asia. In combination with the conviction that the international system was characterised by multipolarity, Eurasia then became a region clearly distinct from the Euro-Atlantic and the Asia-Pacific. And as the hegemon in Eurasia and principal promoter of Eurasian integration, Russia demonstrated its willingness to maintain its place as one of the great power poles in the multipolar order.

At the foundation of Turkish foreign policy is the understanding by the governing elite that Turkey occupies the position of a central country and concomitantly as an influential global actor. This is primarily based on a geopolitical reading of Turkey's position at the centre of (Afro-)Eurasia. However, this is also coupled with a historical understanding, because the country's legacy as the heir of the Ottoman Empire and its role as a bridge between civilisations, positions Turkey as the leader of its own civilisational basin. Hence, Turkey's central position, which is also related to Eurasia both geographically and culturally, provides the country with manifold links to other countries and regions, thus making it a powerful country on the global stage.

In sum, although a number of similarities exist between Russia and Turkey, each country has a unique and individual understanding of the 'geopolitical space' of Eurasia and its importance in their foreign policy. In the case of Russia, Eurasia is a central feature in government discourse which became more important over time,

¹¹ Putin 2012b

whereas in Turkey, its importance decreased over the years. Eurasia is also an instrumental concept in that it allows the attribution of different characteristics to Russian and Turkish foreign policy. As such, Eurasia functions as an important zone for Russia's and Turkey's economic development, for the projection of their political power and thus emphasises their role as powerful and influential players in the international system. The conceptualisation of Eurasia and Russia's and Turkey's role within this geopolitical space are not identical. Eurasia is a discursive notion lacking a uniform set of characteristics. Indeed, one of the principal postulates of this thesis is that Eurasia functions as a flexible concept, being shaped and re-shaped by the discourse of Russia's and Turkey's governing elite on the basis of changing geopolitical visions.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured as follows: *Chapter two* presents the theoretical reflections and methodological framework underlying this thesis. It is divided into two parts: the first part discusses critical geopolitics theory and its relevance to foreign policy analysis and describes what discourse analysis is and how it is to be done. The second part details the methodological framework and its qualitative analysis approach including a discussion on sample and selection criteria.

To provide a foundation for the subsequent analysis, *Chapter three* offers a general overview of Russian and Turkish foreign policy. The focus lies on the post-Cold War era and especially on the more contemporary period over the last fifteen years or so, starting with Putin's accession to the presidency in Russia in 1999/2000 and the AKP's and Erdoğan's first electoral victory in 2002 in the case of Turkey.

Chapter four provides an in-depth discussion of the concept of Eurasia in general, as well as specifically in the Russian and Turkish cases. In the first part, the emergence of Eurasia as a geopolitical concept after the Cold War and its use in academia and policy circles are described. Thereafter, the discussion moves on to the concept of Eurasia in Russia, ranging from classical Eurasianism to Eurasian ideas in Russia today, and in Turkey, focusing on diverging visions of Turkish Eurasianism and the new concept of Afro-Eurasia.

The analytical core of the thesis is formed by *Chapters five* and *six*, which present the results and an in-depth discussion of the analysis of Russian and Turkish discourse on Eurasia. Both chapters are structured in the same way, starting with a thematic discussion focusing on the prevalent themes in Russian and Turkish discourse on Eurasia, namely geography, history/culture and economy/integration, before moving on to a chronological analysis of the evolution of Russian and Turkish government elite discourse on Eurasia.

Chapter seven presents a concise analysis of how the concept of Eurasia is linked to the Russian and Turkish governing elites' understanding of their country's place in the global system. In a second part, it briefly discusses the importance of other geopolitical regions for Russia and Turkey. Finally, *Chapter eight* offers an overall conclusion and a summary of the main findings of this thesis.

Chapter 2: Theory and methodological framework

The aim of this chapter is to provide the theoretical and methodological foundation for the subsequent analysis of Russian and Turkish discourse on Eurasia. Focusing on the discourse of political elites means that their geopolitical imagination and the way in which these elites attribute meaning to the geopolitical space of Eurasia are at the core of this research. Furthermore, questions of geographical assumptions, national identity, as well as foreign policy discourse and practice are discussed. This calls for a theoretical framework which is particularly well suited to integrate all these elements. Critical geopolitics offers precisely this. To briefly summarise, as the subtitle of Gearoid O Tuathail's 1996 landmark book *Critical Geopolitics* says, critical geopolitics is the 'politics of writing global space'.¹ Critical geopolitics is a theory which emerged within political geography and focused on a critical reading of and engagement with hegemonial geopolitical discourses. The essential claim of critical geopolitics is that geography is not a fixed or static entity but that 'geography as earthly location and resource endowment is what states make of it'.² As a result, geopolitical discourses, and above all governmental elite discourses, are at the core of critical geopolitical analyses. The link to foreign policy is direct in that discourses condition possible actions and limit the playing field. As Kuus argues, critical geopolitical scholarship 'investigates how geographical claims and assumptions function in political debates and political practice'.³ Hence, the main point is not just to identify and study powerful discourses but to investigate how precisely they are powerful and how they make certain foreign policy practices possible and more likely than others.

The principal object of study in this research is the discourse of Russia's and Turkey's governing elites. In practice, this means that a dataset was put together, consisting of a large number of political speeches, articles published in the media and interviews with the media from the two countries' top government officials. This study has a limited time frame, ranging from the year 2000 to 2015 in the case of Russia, and from 2002 to 2015 in the case of Turkey, and all the speeches and interviews took place over that period. In most cases, the source for the primary data were the websites of

¹ O Tuathail 1996

² Toal 2017: 40

³ Kuus 2010: 683

the Russian and Turkish governments and ministries, which provided English-language translations of the speeches.

Every researcher working with such material is confronted with the question of how to do discourse analysis properly. There is no one size fits all solution and the method of doing discourse analysis needs to be tailored to the object under study. I thus elaborated a methodological framework which started with a two-step reading process, consisting of an exploratory phase and an explanatory phase. This process allowed me to identify the main issues and themes emanating from Russian and Turkish government discourse on Eurasia (which are described in detail later and analysed in chapters 5 and 6). Discourse analysis is a qualitative approach with a variety of tools and choices to be made along the way. On the other hand, every research project also has its limitations, ranging from the question of which texts to select, to questions of access, to the absence of texts, or to the practical need of having to limit the research to one particular aspect. This research, for instance, focuses on elite discourse and thus leaves aside a number of highly relevant and interesting other elements, such as popular discourse. However, focusing on elite discourse in the realm of foreign policy nonetheless provides crucial insight into a country's geopolitical imagination and the elite's perception of their country's place in the global system.

This chapter presents the theoretical foundations for my research. The first section briefly presents the principal concepts and ideas of critical geopolitics. In a second step, the notions of foreign policy analysis and discourse analysis in relationship to critical geopolitics are discussed. In the second part of the chapter, I lay out my methodological framework detailing the way in which the discourse analysis of Russian and Turkish foreign policy was conducted. Finally, I consider issues related to sample selection and interviews, and I reflect on the limitations of my approach.

2.1 Geopolitics, foreign policy and discourse

This thesis studies the meaning of Eurasia for Russia and Turkey via an analysis of the two countries' government discourse. At the core of this research project are notions

of national identity, geopolitical imagination and their influence on foreign policy.⁴ Focusing on the construction of ‘geopolitical spaces’ by a country’s political elite means that official state discourse, defined here as discourses by the country’s top government officials in the realm of foreign policy, is at the core of this analysis. My argument is that the notions of national identity, geopolitical imagination and foreign policy are linked to each other in a triangular relationship, in which each of these aspects influences and in turn is influenced by the others. Rather than being in a hierarchical relationship, where for instance the country’s national identity determines the elite’s geopolitical imagination which then in turn leads to a specific foreign policy course or action, this thesis claims that there is a horizontal relationship between each of these elements. They are in a constant conversation and have reciprocal influence on each other.

For instance, according to Prizel, national identity and foreign policy are linked together in a ‘dialectical relationship’ in the sense that ‘all countries frequently use national identity to articulate their foreign policies and in turn, rely on foreign policy as a foundation of their legitimacy’.⁵ Hence, national identity does influence the country’s geopolitical imagination, but at the same time, foreign policy actions and their outcomes have an influence on national identity. As Hansen argues, ‘foreign policies rely upon representations of identity, but it is also through the formulation of foreign policy that identities are produced and reproduced’.⁶ Similarly, a specific geopolitical imagination might lead the country’s leaders to pursue a particular course of action, but while doing so, it influences the way in which they see the country’s national identity. Studying the foreign policy of multi-ethnic states with Ukraine as an example, Shulman for instance noted that ‘foreign policy becomes a key element in the construction of national identity and an object of political contestation between groups with different visions of that identity’.⁷ My framework goes even further in that the domestic political contestation and the diverging visions of a country’s national identity equally influence foreign policy. There is an interplay between discourse and

⁴ For a select sample of work discussing (at least some aspects of) the relationship between national identity, geopolitical imagination and foreign policy, see Campbell 1992; Dijkink 1996; Prizel 1998; Hopf 2002; Waever 2002; Hansen 2006; Guzzini 2012; White and Feklyunina 2014.

⁵ Prizel 1998: 19

⁶ Hansen 2006: 1

⁷ Shulman 1998: 124

external events which both influence and shape foreign policy choices. I thus differ slightly from Dijkink's definition which is based on a hierarchical ordering which understands 'geopolitical visions as translations of national-identity concepts in geographical terms and symbols' while 'geopolitical visions may be described as just a subset within the foreign policy belief-system'.⁸

This research project incorporates approaches and ideas from post-structuralism and critical geopolitics, a set of theories which are epistemologically compatible, and which provide particularly useful concepts for the analysis of geopolitics, identity and foreign policy on the basis of a discourse analysis. The basic tenet adopted here is that geographical space is not a fixed entity but is shaped and defined through discourse. Similarly, it is based on the assumption that 'geography is "dynamic" in that the meaning of space, distance, territory, and borders can change in the perceptions of peoples and foreign policy-making elites'.⁹ Similarly, following Larsen, 'we cannot take as a given that a particular geographical location always leads to one particular attitude or discourse. Geographical or geopolitical facts can be mediated quite differently'.¹⁰ Hence, it is only through the discursive practices of foreign policy elites that meaning is attached to geopolitical space. Given these considerations, this thesis is grounded in a critical geopolitical understanding of international relations, focusing on notions of identity and discourse, and how 'global space is incessantly reimagined and rewritten by centers of power and authority'.¹¹ Critical geopolitics is interested in how geopolitical analysis functions as an aide in the conduct of a state's foreign policy and this strand of ideas and theories is thus particularly relevant for my research topic. I thus follow Agnew in his argument that 'one expropriation of the term [geopolitics] ascribes to it a more specific meaning: [the] examination of the geographical assumptions, designations and understandings that enter into the making of world politics'.¹² Or, to use the words of O Tuathail, 'geopolitics is a writing of the geographical meanings and politics of states'.¹³

⁸ Dijkink 1996: 14-15

⁹ Starr 2013: 439

¹⁰ Larsen 1997: 23

¹¹ O Tuathail 1996: 249

¹² Agnew 2003: 5

¹³ O Tuathail 1999: 109

Critical geopolitics emerged on the margins of political geography in the 1990s, and has since moved into the mainstream, crossing disciplinary boundaries and being frequently applied by international relations scholars. As a research programme it is ideally suited to bridge the gap between disciplines, thus following Kadercan's call for more interaction between political geography and international relations.¹⁴ While much of this work is informed by international relations scholarship, especially constructivist work on the foreign policy-identity nexus, including country specific work,¹⁵ the main concepts and methodological framework are derived from critical geopolitics for their relevance in studying foreign policy discourses, especially from an elite perspective. In what follows I will present a discussion of critical geopolitics, its main concepts and the uses of critical geopolitics in analysing foreign policy and government discourses. Hence, the way in which I use discourse analysis and foreign policy analysis are all linked to my basic methodological framework derived from critical geopolitics.

2.1.1 Critical geopolitics

Critical geopolitics first emerged as a critical study of classical geopolitical thought. Classical geopolitics is a theory that blends geography and statecraft and was first used towards the end of the 19th century by European imperial geographers, who were analysing the territorial composition of the world in order to present possibilities to maintain and augment their country's influence in global affairs.¹⁶ As such, as O Tuathail has noted, geopolitics was first and foremost a European imperialist concept by which the European empires divided up the yet unconquered global space between them, and thereafter fought for influence and control over that space.¹⁷ According to this conception, the aim of geopolitics was to present the world map in a form that would allow the imperial powers to exert control over it and prevent other powers from doing so.

Critical geopolitics, arguing that geopolitics is a condition defined by states and thus differs according to the viewpoint of each state, stands in opposition to those viewing

¹⁴ Kadercan 2015

¹⁵ For Russia, Hopf (2002) and Clunan (2009) are among the most prominent examples. See Bozdağlıoğlu (2003) for a constructivist study of Turkish foreign policy.

¹⁶ Flint 2006: 17

¹⁷ O Tuathail 1996: 15

geography as given and for whom geopolitics designates the world political map which determines the way in which states act. Put differently, geopolitics is thus either a static or flexible condition. These two diverging views are briefly exemplified below by contrasting two authors, Jakub Grygiel and Gearoid O Tuathail.¹⁸ Grygiel, who can be seen as a representative of the first reading of geopolitics, for instance argues that ‘geopolitics is an objective reality, independent of state wishes and interests, that is determined by routes and centers of resources’.¹⁹ According to this view, geopolitics is a situation that exists, a fixed entity in world politics. The perception policy-makers have of these centres of resources and the routes connecting them are not important because they cannot change the fundamentally geographical layout of the world. Grygiel argues that ‘states cannot alter geopolitics to match their interests’ because ‘a change in geopolitics involves a change in routes or in the location of resources’.²⁰ This approach does not take into account social accounts of power and the way in which political perceptions and misperceptions can have an influence on a state’s foreign policy.

For O Tuathail, on the other hand, geopolitics is typically a state practice and not a fixed notion which is out of a state’s purview. Hence, geopolitics and especially the texts which came to define the field of geopolitics are ‘governmentalized forms of geographical knowledge [...] that sought to organize and discipline what was increasingly experienced as unitary global space into particularistic regimes of nationalistic, ideological, racial, and civilizational truths’.²¹ According to this second reading of geopolitics, its aim is to divide the global map into different places or regions which are being attributed a value that allows states to categorise these places and regions, mostly in terms of whether they are important for a state’s foreign policy (for example with regard to resources or alliances) or not. States not only act within a geopolitical landscape, they actively define and develop it too. Furthermore, states also have identities which change and evolve, not necessarily always in conjunction with changes of the global system.

¹⁸ For a very helpful general overview and systematic comparison between classical and critical geopolitics see Kelly 2006.

¹⁹ Grygiel 2006: 24

²⁰ Grygiel 2006: 25

²¹ O Tuathail 1996: 15

In the mainstream, classical geopolitical writing has come to be understood as a way of trying to make sense of the world map as an orientation for a country's or empire's foreign policy. Put differently, as an end product of a geopolitical analysis, one would get an amended political map of the world, which puts countries and regions into perspective according to a highly subjective value-system. The attribution of value to areas and places is inherently geopolitical. The defining texts of traditional or classical geopolitics, for instance, all served clear political and/or military purposes. According to Kearns, four thinkers who 'were passionately interested in the territorial struggles between states and in the rise and fall of empires' were instrumental in establishing geopolitics: 'the naval strategist from the United States, Alfred Mahan (1840-1914), on sea-power; the German geographer, Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904), on Lebensraum; Halford Mackinder (1861-1947), on land-power; and Rudolf Kjellen (1864-1922), a Swedish political scientist, on regional blocs'.²² Alfred Mahan, for instance, argued that sea powers as opposed to land powers were better positioned to dominate global politics because of the contiguous and united nature of oceans.²³ The imperial British geographer, Sir Halford Mackinder, characterised the composition of the global geographical space from Britain's perspective in order to derive an understanding which would further Britain's global position.²⁴ He expanded upon these ideas in his book *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, published in 1919, where he aimed at dividing the world map into different territorial swathes which were needed for global control and domination, arguing that control of the massive land area of Eurasia, called the 'heartland', was primordial for the survival of empire.²⁵

In contrast, but inspired by the latter, Nicholas Spykman (1893-1943), a professor of international relations, for instance argued that control of the 'rimlands', corresponding to the densely populated outer crescents of the Eurasian heartland, was more important for global domination. Spykman's ideas were driven by the goal to help the US government maintain its global influence and propose a strategic vision for 'an active, non-isolationist' foreign policy.²⁶ A similar, more recent, example of

²² Kearns 2009: 3-4

²³ Mahan 1890

²⁴ Mackinder 1904. For a more detailed deconstruction of Mackinder's lecture, see O Tuathail (1996: 25-35).

²⁵ Mackinder 1919

²⁶ Flint 2006: 22

classical geopolitical writing is the book *The Grand Chessboard* by Zbigniew Brzezinski, a former US National Security Advisor, in which he outlines his geopolitical vision of the world following the breakdown of the bipolar Cold War system. Brzezinski instrumentalises the notion of chessboard to visually demonstrate the importance of the Eurasian region as a means to control and dominate global politics.²⁷

The view which this thesis takes it that geopolitics is not a fixed entity or a static division of the world. Rather, geopolitics designates a country's attempts to make sense of the global political map according to its foreign policy priorities. In the subsequent analysis of Russian and Turkish government discourse on the meaning of Eurasia, the way in which value is added to a place, is central. However, the focus is not on material factors, such as military movements or supply chains, but on the ideational meaning of Eurasia for Russian and Turkish foreign policy. As such, a critical analysis of such visions and writings is needed in order to understand the real truth behind those geopolitical ideas. The aim of critical geopolitics is to move beyond existing imperial understandings of geopolitics and deconstruct the existing geopolitical explanations of global politics.

2.1.1.1 The foundations of critical geopolitics

Critical geopolitics emerged as a set of ideas and concepts in the early 1990s, within the general intellectual context of emerging post-positivist and post-structuralist approaches to social science, fuelled by the rejection of the modern geopolitics of the bipolar, Cold War era.²⁸ Towards the end of the 20th century, there was a growing sentiment among political geographers and international relations scholars that global politics could not be understood solely from the point of view of traditional geopolitics, but that globalisation and its epiphenomena called for new approaches. Hence, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which brought about a new visualisation of the hitherto fixed global map in terms of controlled and contested territories,²⁹ there was a need for new visions of the geopolitical order. In this context, critical geopolitics emerged and aimed at deconstructing the classical claim that geography and

²⁷ Brzezinski 1997

²⁸ Kuus 2010

²⁹ O Tuathail 1997: 44-45

geopolitics are fixed entities to which states are subjected in their conduct of foreign policy. Indeed, as O Tuathail argues:

[Critical geopolitics] problematizes the “is” of “geography” and “geopolitics”, their status as self-evident, natural, foundational, and eminently knowable realities. It questions how “geography” and “geopolitics” as signs have been put to work in global politics in the twentieth century and how they have supervised the production of visions of the global political scene.³⁰

As the above quote demonstrates, critical geopolitics moves on from a static understanding of the influence of geography on foreign policy and takes a more actor-specific approach in that it analyses the way in which specific actors, such as governments, speak about geography and attribute value to territory. Thus, critical geopolitics is interested in ‘how global space is produced and organized by governmentalizing intellectuals of statecraft’.³¹

At this point it is necessary to add a caveat. Despite the increasing prominence of critical geopolitics and its wide-spread use in both political geography and international relations, critical geopolitics is not a homogenous set of theories and ideas. Rather, it assembles various strands of critical thinking, and a multitude of definitions as well as methodological applications exist.³² One definition of critical geopolitics is provided by Dodds, Kuus and Sharp:

This critical work approaches geopolitics not as a neutral consideration of pre-given “geographical” facts, but as a deeply ideological and politicized form of analysis. It shows that geographical claims are necessarily geopolitical, as they inscribe places as particular types of places to be dealt with in a particular manner.³³

Kuus also adds that in ‘eschewing the traditional question of how geography does or can influence politics, [critical geopolitics] investigates how geographical claims and assumptions function in political debates and political practice’.³⁴ In a similar vein,

³⁰ O Tuathail 1996: 68

³¹ O Tuathail 1996: 18

³² Dalby 2010: 280

³³ Dodds, Kuus and Sharp 2013: 6

³⁴ Kuus 2010: 683

Müller argues that ‘critical geopolitics examines the very construction and social effects of geopolitical imaginations and geopolitical identities – the imaginary spatial positioning of people, regions, states and the shifting boundaries that accompany this positioning’.³⁵ Finally, O Tuathail defines critical geopolitics as ‘a problematizing theoretical enterprise that places the existing structures of power and knowledge in question’ and in which ‘[...] knowledge is always situated knowledge, articulating the perspective of certain cultures and subjects while marginalizing that of others’.³⁶

As this very brief discussion demonstrates, critical geopolitics is a set of ideas about the way in which geographical knowledge is used, produced and emphasised by powerful actors. Hence, geopolitics cannot be considered a static vision of global politics, nor does it advance a unitary representation of the world map. Rather, all those involved in the making of politics project meaning upon the space which they inhabit. Territory, space and geographies are being actively (re)formulated by those in power in order to attribute value to them. Geopolitics is a discursive practice trying to represent the world in terms that are understandable and acceptable both for the political leaders as well as the population of a country. As John Agnew rightly argues:

The world is actively spatialized, divided up, labelled, sorted out into a hierarchy of places of greater or lesser “importance” by political geographers, other academics and political leaders. This process provides the geographical framing within which political elites and mass publics act in the world in pursuit of their own identities and interests.³⁷

Discursive practices and discourse are important concepts in critical geopolitics. Meaning is conferred upon states and regions by policy-makers’ discourses and subsequent backing through policy measures. As Bassin argues:

Space becomes a discursive subject, and whatever meaning or significance it may possess is not inherent or a priori, but rather is projected onto it – in a ceaselessly revolving kaleidoscope of signification – by political or geopolitical discourses. It is these discourses themselves, consequently, which become the proper object of critical-geopolitical analysis.³⁸

³⁵ Müller 2008: 323

³⁶ O Tuathail 1999: 107-108

³⁷ Agnew 2003: 3

³⁸ Bassin 2004: 621

It is against this backdrop that critical geopolitics provides useful analytical tools to examine foreign policy and state actions.

While there are diverging definitions of critical geopolitics, it is commonly accepted that there are three analytical strands within it: formal, practical and popular geopolitics. The framework of critical geopolitics is graphically shown in *Figure 2.1*. As O Tuathail and Dalby note, popular geopolitics can be ‘found within the artifacts of transnational popular culture’, including newspapers, magazines, movies and many other public forms of communication.³⁹ In contrast, as Mamadouh and Dijkink observe, formal geopolitics is the ‘domain of academics and advisors’.⁴⁰ It focuses on the more theoretical writings of strategists and analysts and is thus distinct from the third strand, practical geopolitics, which is the realm of ‘state leaders and the foreign policy bureaucracy’, and focuses on the formulation and execution of foreign policy or geopolitical reasoning behind a state’s actions and the discursive practices which lead to those actions.⁴¹ According to the definition of O Tuathail and Agnew in their seminal article published in 1992:

Practical geopolitical reasoning is reasoning by means of consensual and unremarkable assumptions about places and their particular identities. This is the reasoning of practitioners of statecraft, of statespersons, politicians and military commanders. [...] practical geopolitical reasoning tends to be of a common-sense type which relies on the narratives and binary distinctions found in societal mythologies.⁴²

Put differently, practical geopolitics comprises the every-day geopolitical assumptions of a country’s governing elite and the way in which they make sense of the world and the most acute problems arising in the international system. In studying foreign policy discourse, practical geopolitics is particularly relevant because it reminds us of the processes of idea formation within bureaucracies and the communication of those ideas to the public through speech acts. It is obvious, that practical geopolitics is closely interrelated with the other two strands. Hence, formal geopolitical writings will

³⁹ O Tuathail and Dalby 1998: 4. For a good example of popular geopolitics, see Sharp 2000.

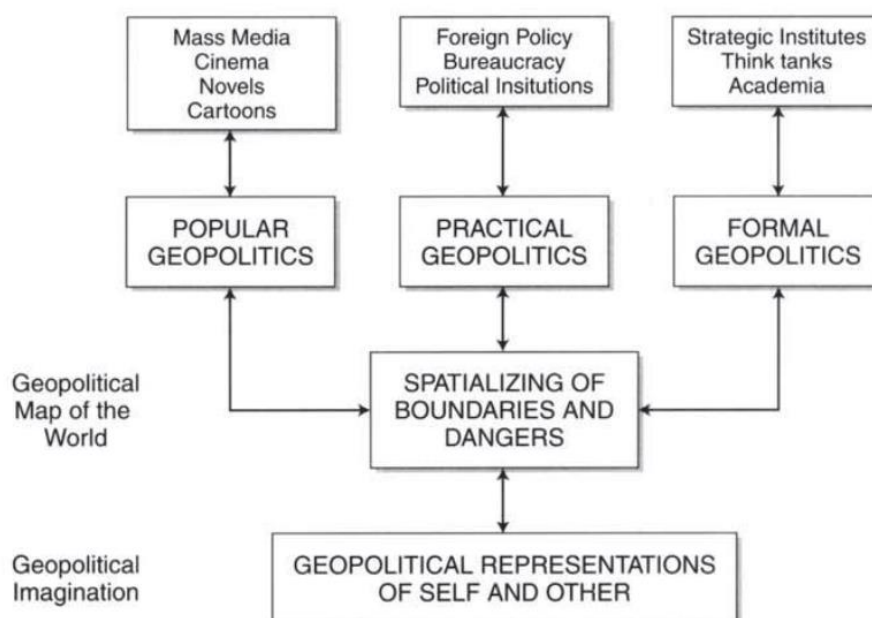
⁴⁰ Mamadouh and Dijkink 2006: 355

⁴¹ O Tuathail and Dalby 1998: 4; Mamadouh and Dijkink 2006: 355

⁴² O Tuathail and Agnew 1992: 194

inform the practical geopolitical vision of policy-makers while the latter's discourses and actions might be reflected in a popular cultural format such as a movie, while the same in reverse is also true. However, every strand has a particular analytical value in itself. For the purpose of this study, practical geopolitics is particularly useful, given the focus on the geopolitical representations of the geographical space inhabited by Russia and Turkey and how the government elite in these countries perceives that geopolitical reality. As O Tuathail has argued, practical geopolitics is synonymous with foreign policy analysis within international relations scholarship, especially with regard to social constructivist writings which is particularly close to critical geopolitics.⁴³ Hence, in the next section, I will discuss the relevance of critical geopolitics in analysing foreign policy.

Figure 2.1 The framework of critical geopolitics (O Tuathail and Dalby 1998: 5)



2.1.2 Foreign policy analysis and critical geopolitics

Focusing analytically on practical geopolitics brings foreign policy into the fore. Foreign policy can be considered the translation of the policy-makers' geopolitical imaginations into practice. Indeed, as Dodds argues, critical geopolitics as a field of research can be particularly useful in foreign policy analysis:

⁴³ O Tuathail 2002: 604

The practice of foreign policy is inherently geopolitical because it involves the construction of meaning and values of spaces and places. [...] critical geopolitics seeks to examine how geographical representations are constructed and how those representations in turn structure the perceived reality of places.⁴⁴

This emphasis on the discursive notion and power of foreign policy is central. According to Kuus, ‘state identity and interest do not precede foreign policy, but are forged through foreign policy practices. The enactments of state interest and identity are therefore among the key themes of critical geopolitics’.⁴⁵ Hence, foreign policy as state practice has the practical aim of naming places in order to confer meaning upon them. Hansen argues that foreign policy is both predicated upon ‘representations of identity’ while simultaneously also formulating and producing a state’s identity. In so doing, discourses mix the material and ideational worlds to produce a single narrative for a country’s foreign policy.⁴⁶

Through the formulation of foreign policy, which in turn is often based on a geopolitical understanding of global politics and the region which is inhabited by the country in question, a state’s national identity is also defined. States, or rather their political elite, conceptualise their state identity, or their state’s ‘geopolitical code’, by answering the question ‘where are we?’ in addition to ‘where are our friends and where our enemies?’.⁴⁷ Essentially the same idea is behind Dijkink’s concept of ‘geopolitical visions’, which are defined as ‘any idea concerning the relation between one’s own and other places, involving feelings of (in)security or (dis)advantage (and/or) invoking ideas about a collective mission or foreign policy strategy’.⁴⁸ Hence, geopolitical visions, which are of course strongly influenced by – and simultaneously influence – national identity are a function of a state’s foreign policy. Using foreign policy discourses as a means to define a stable identity makes sense because this requires a simultaneous answer to the two questions mentioned above and a definition of the ‘us’ and ‘them’. For Diez, however, the way in which discourse and foreign policy inform national identity is not by directly defining it, but rather by showing which are the

⁴⁴ Dodds 1993: 71

⁴⁵ Kuus 2010: 687

⁴⁶ Hansen 2006: 1

⁴⁷ Flint 2006: 55-56

⁴⁸ Dijkink 1996: 11

limits or boundaries of the country's national identity.⁴⁹ Independently of this, it would be wrong to assume that foreign policy is a stable practice. Instead, it continuously reproduces and reformulates state identity not least also because there are diverging fractions within a given foreign policy community, each advocating different identities and practices.

In sum, critical geopolitics moves away from the traditional texts which presented geography as an objective truth and formulated foreign policy strategies accordingly. Foreign policy is no longer simply a tool to achieve control over a fixed territorial entity, rather foreign policy is also a tool to define and re-define new spaces and places, attributing value to them on the basis of the geopolitical vision of the governing elite. At the core of critical geopolitical analyses of foreign policy is thus the concept of discourse. Even though foreign policy needs actions to be relevant and efficient, those actions are backed by justifications and explanations. Therefore, the notion of discourse remains crucial in order to understand a country's foreign policy. The next section offers a brief discussion of the concept of discourse and discourse analysis within critical geopolitics.

2.1.3 The notion of discourse in critical geopolitics

To start the discussion of discourse in critical geopolitics, two definitions of the concept will be presented. The first definition by O Tuathail and Agnew focuses on the comprehensive nature of discourses as value systems and defines them beyond a narrow understanding of discourse as written or verbal texts:

Discourses are best conceptualized as sets of capabilities people have, as sets of socio-cultural resources used by people in the construction of meaning about their world and their activities. It is NOT simply speech or written statements but the rules by which verbal speech and written statements are made meaningful. Discourses enable one to write, speak, listen and act meaningfully.⁵⁰

The second definition by O Tuathail then specifically focuses on geopolitical discourses and how they play an important role in policy-making:

⁴⁹ Diez 2014: 34

⁵⁰ O Tuathail and Agnew 1992: 192-193

Geopolitical discourse encompasses all the languages of statecraft, is drawn upon and used by officials and leaders to constitute and represent world affairs – its constituent locations, defining dramas and leading protagonists – and their own role and strategies in these dramas.⁵¹

As we see from these definitions, discourses are more than just words added up to text or speech. Discourses take place and they define social and political actions and in the end help to make sense of these actions. Especially in the domain of foreign policy making, discourses occupy an important function. In contrast to traditional geopolitics which is all about practice, O Tuathail and Agnew argue that political practice alone is not sufficient to explain the behaviour of a particular state. Instead the analysis should focus on discourse because ‘it is through discourse that leaders act, through the mobilization of certain simple geographical understandings that foreign-policy actions are explained and through ready-made geographically-infused reasoning that wars are rendered meaningful’.⁵² This is not to say that actions as such are void of any meaning, but rather to caution that actions alone do not possess enough meaning and that they only make sense when being legitimised through a discursive act.

However, when embarking upon a critical geopolitical analysis of foreign policy discourse, one should keep in mind Kuus’ four ‘methodological nuances’ which provide the framework for such analyses.⁵³ First, the aim of discourse analysis is not to find the truth or the true meaning behind a discourse. According to Kuus, ‘discourses are neither true nor false. Their significance lies in producing certain claims as meaningful and true’.⁵⁴ The second nuance focuses on language and the content of discourse in that a discourse analysis is not so much focused on what is exactly said in a given text but on how it links to practice by providing the boundaries for which practices are acceptable and which are not. Based on this, the third nuance focuses on the link between discourse and practice by arguing that discourses ‘frame political debate in such a way as to make certain policies appear reasonable and feasible while marginalizing other policy options as unreasonable and unfeasible’ instead of directly

⁵¹ O Tuathail 2002: 607

⁵² O Tuathail and Agnew 1992: 191

⁵³ Kuus 2007: 9-10

⁵⁴ Kuus 2007: 9

causing a particular policy outcome.⁵⁵ Finally, the fourth methodological nuance concerns disagreements meaning that ‘discourses do not enforce complete agreement or a unified methodology’ but rather that they are composed of a variety of practices.⁵⁶

While for the most part geopolitical discourses are specific to the situation of one country, there are also some geopolitical discourses of global dimensions. Here we come back to the international state system as the prevailing form of organisation in global politics and also to the origins of geopolitics as imperial form of knowledge. Thus, some states, normally called great powers, have more power than others in global politics. As a result, their way of representing the world carries more weight than that of others, especially since actions by great powers ultimately have an influence on a large number of other states or regional actors. As an example, Dalby mentions the actions of the United States (US) in the context of the ‘war on terror’ through which the US redefined on a global level who its friends and foes were (‘coalition of the willing’ versus ‘axis of evil’), and which regions were safe and which dangerous. This US geopolitical discourse, of course, had a wide impact beyond the borders of the United States.⁵⁷

The same can be said about Russian discourses on Eurasia or the Eurasian Economic Union since it encompasses other countries in the region which, although sharing a common history with Russia, might have a different view on the region. Toal for instance defines the post-Soviet space as a ‘contested geopolitical field’ comprising five different actors, ranging from the state to movements within the state, to regional organisations, as well as to the external power complex.⁵⁸ In such a context, Russia is but one among many actors and the various meanings and stakes of the regional environment depend on the geopolitical imagination of every one of these actors. However, given its powerful position as former imperial centre with a wide network of remaining economic, cultural, security and other links to its neighbouring countries, its geopolitical vision might be considered as particularly influential in the post-Soviet space. Indeed, as O Tuathail and Agnew argue:

⁵⁵ Kuus 2007: 10

⁵⁶ Kuus 2007: 10

⁵⁷ See Dalby 2003, 2007

⁵⁸ Toal 2017: 33-38

Intellectuals of statecraft from core states – particularly those states which are competing for hegemony – have disproportionate influence and power over how international political space is represented. [...] Their power is a power to constitute the terms of geopolitical world order, an ordering of international space which defines the central drama of international politics in particularistic ways.⁵⁹

Formulated differently by Mamadouh and Dijkink, ‘only very powerful or hegemonic states can link geopolitical visions with an international power practice changing world order. Most other states will use geopolitical representation as a domestic justification for certain (realistic) international routines’.⁶⁰

2.1.4 Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is a broad term for a wide array of methods and methodologies used across different disciplines. Indeed, as Müller argues, ‘discourse analysis is sometimes (mis-)taken to be a method of data analysis, just like content analysis or factor analysis. Yet, more than only a method, above all discourse analysis is a methodology’.⁶¹ In its essence, discourse analysis focuses on the study of texts, speech and language more generally. The main theoretical foundation of this thesis is critical geopolitics and the subsequent discussion focuses on the utility of the critical geopolitical framework for doing discourse analysis. However, it shares a number of characteristics with post-structuralist discourse analysis which has a similar understanding of discourses as encompassing both ideational and material factors and being highly constitutive of social reality.⁶² Thus, before considering discourse analysis and critical geopolitics, a brief introductory discussion of some general concepts of discourse analysis will be presented.

A good starting point for this discussion is the question of what discourse analysis actually is. A simple definition comes from Dunn and Neumann: ‘in general, discourse analysts tend to interrogate the ways in which specific systems of meaning-production have been generated, circulated, internalized, and/or resisted’.⁶³ Similarly,

⁵⁹ O Tuathail and Agnew 1992: 195

⁶⁰ Mamadouh and Dijkink 2006: 356-357

⁶¹ Müller 2010: 4

⁶² Hansen 2006

⁶³ Dunn and Neumann 2016: 4

Holzscheiter argues that ‘discourse analysis is an engagement with meaning and the linguistic and communicative processes through which social reality is constructed’.⁶⁴ In a seminal article, Milliken discusses the emergence of discourse analysis within international relations and argues that there are three underlying theoretical claims to which discourse analysts subscribe.⁶⁵ First, discourses function as ‘structures of signification which construct social realities’, that is the material world only acquires meaning through discourse. The second notion focuses on the delimiting capability of discourses, or the way in which ‘discourses make intelligible some ways of being in, and acting towards, the world, and of operationalizing a particular “regime of truth” while excluding other possible modes of identity and action’. Finally, the third claim focuses on discourses as unstable and in need of being rearticulated constantly or, as Milliken puts it, ‘being unstable grids, requiring work to “articulate” and “rearticulate” their knowledges and identities (to fix the “regime of truth”) and open-ended meshes, making discourses changeable and in fact historically contingent’.⁶⁶

What becomes clear from this brief overview is that there is no single definition of discourse. In their essence, ‘discourses are systems of meaning-production that fix meaning, however temporarily, and enable actors to make sense of the world and to act within it’.⁶⁷ That is to say that without discourses, the social reality would still exist, but it would be impossible to define its importance and meaning. Discourse analysis thus uncovers the structures of meaning, makes apparent what is hidden, and brings the material and ideational to life in that it studies the consequences and political effects of discursive practices. It is important to note that the aim of discourse analysis is not necessarily to find out precisely which actions are determined by a given discourse but rather ‘specifying the bandwidth of possible outcomes’.⁶⁸

Another critical aspect pertains to the divergent conceptions of discourse analysis and its function as either an explanatory strategy or a critical enterprise. The distinction is whether the researcher is interested in explaining foreign policy strategies and outcomes or in uncovering the hegemonic meaning and delimiting function of a

⁶⁴ Holzscheiter 2014: 144

⁶⁵ Milliken 1999

⁶⁶ Milliken 1999: 229-230

⁶⁷ Dunn and Neumann 2016: 4

⁶⁸ Neumann 2008a: 62

discourse. Diez argues that discourse analysis should primarily be concerned with a critical enquiry aimed at ‘problematifying prevailing understandings in politics’. However, given that ‘discourse provides the context in which individual policy articulations are set’ they nonetheless provide important and interesting clues for explaining foreign policy.⁶⁹

One of the principal questions for every researcher engaging in discourse analysis is how to actually conduct discourse analysis. As already mentioned above, discourse analysis is a methodology with a plethora of methods and essentially every discourse analyst has to define their own method which best suits the research question and the data. While Müller agrees with this, he nevertheless calls for more theoretical engagement with discourse analysis and a methodological discussion of one’s own approach.⁷⁰ In the second part of this chapter, I will thus discuss my methodological framework and detail the way in which I proceed in my discourse analysis. However, one overarching feature is common to all discourse analysis, namely that there is nothing beyond the discourse and that ‘the analyst has to work with what has actually been said or written, exploring patterns in and across the statements and identifying the social consequences of different discursive representations of reality’.⁷¹

Nevertheless, there exist a number of models and strategies of structuring a discourse analytical research model. Neumann, for instance, uses a three-step model: in the first instance, texts are delimited, which means narrowed down to a comprehensive set of data. The second step consists of mapping representations, that is identifying the various representations present in the discourse. Finally, in the third step discourses are layered to demonstrate the differences between the discourse such as their dominant or marginalised position or their historical weight.⁷²

Another way of doing discourse analysis is by adopting one of three strategies ‘focusing on *continuity*, *change*, or *rupture*’ or as Mutlu and Salter also call them, plastic, elastic and genealogical discourse analysis.⁷³ Plastic discourse analysis is thus

⁶⁹ Diez 2014: 28

⁷⁰ Müller 2010

⁷¹ Jorgensen and Phillips 2002: 21

⁷² Neumann 2008a: 66-73

⁷³ Mutlu and Salter 2013: 113 (emphasis in original)

interested in the ‘persistence of particular metaphorical schema’ focusing on how discourses are connected to each other and referenced on a nodal point discourse thus using the method of intertextuality. Elastic discourse analysis then focuses on how discourses change over time and aims to ‘trace the new relations between signs, tropes or metaphorical schema’. Finally, genealogical discourse analysis focuses on the absent and the suppressed in that it ‘seeks ruptures, silences, breaks, marginalized voices or subjugated knowledges’ which are just as important as what is present in the discourse.⁷⁴ My own approach comes closest to elastic discourse analysis since I am interested in the presence and evolution of the concept of Eurasia in the discourse of Russian and Turkish government elites. In the next section, I turn to the discussion of the specific methodological framework of this thesis.

2.2 Methodological framework

Critical geopolitics and its concepts provide a particularly useful framework for the analysis of foreign policy, especially since the level of analysis lies with the government and the highest echelons of power in Russia and Turkey. In what follows, I will describe the methodological approach which frames my research. The first section will touch upon the criteria for the selection of data and the sample size. In a second step, I will detail the way in which I proceeded with the analysis of this data. The final section presents a brief discussion about fieldwork and conducting interviews.

2.2.1 Sample and selection criteria

In order to engage in discourse analysis, one has to have a sample of texts to read. Which texts to choose and when to stop adding material is a crucial question.⁷⁵ There is no general answer to this question as each research project has different needs and the researcher needs to define a suitable sample. This research project is interested in the geopolitical imagination of Russia’s and Turkey’s governing elite. More specifically, it researches the way in which Eurasia is being portrayed in their discourse and how meaning is attributed to it. Furthermore, it investigates the link between

⁷⁴ Mutlu and Salter 2013: 114

⁷⁵ For a detailed discussion of this issue, see step 1 (‘delimiting texts’) of Neumann’s three-step model for doing discourse analysis (Neumann 2008a: 65-70).

geopolitical imagination and foreign policy practice. What this thesis is thus interested in is the official discourse emanating from the two countries' government elites, and as a result, at the centre of this research is a relatively small number of protagonists: the top government officials of Russia and Turkey (see *Table 2.1* and *Table 2.2*). Obviously, a complete picture of Turkey's and Russia's geopolitical imagination and discourse on Eurasia would only be complete when integrating a large number of other actors and viewpoints, ranging from popular views to academic discourse or literary oeuvres, as well as a wide array of historical material. However, for the purpose of this study, which focuses on the importance of geopolitical imaginations on the formulation of foreign policy, a narrow engagement with the governing elites of Russia and Turkey is necessary.

This thesis is interested in the official view and representation of Eurasia in Russian and Turkish discourse. In particular, this research is interested in the way in which Russia's and Turkey's governing elite explain their foreign policy to external audiences instead of their own population (the two obviously being connected). This means that the focus lies on the public discourse and on people authorised to speak on behalf of the country. In most cases, these are senior government officials and representatives. Their geopolitical imagination and the structures of their public discourse are thus at the centre of this research, which focuses on public texts and speeches. According to Waever, this is a huge methodological advantage when studying foreign policy because especially in foreign policy 'much *is* hidden' and focusing solely on publicly available texts, instead of trying to figure out what government elites really think, will lead to a clearer argument.⁷⁶ In addition, focusing on public texts provides many advantages, ranging from accessibility to providing a large sample over a longer time frame.

The next question to tackle is how to select personalities to include in the sample, to decide who is indeed authorised to speak as well as how representative of official discourse they are. For the sake of simplicity, but also for pragmatic methodological reasons, the approach chosen in this thesis has been very narrow in that only a small number of actors have been included in the sample. This research thus focuses on the

⁷⁶ Waever 2002: 26-27, emphasis in original

highest echelons of the Russian and Turkish governments. Only a select number of functions such as President, Prime Minister or Foreign Minister were included on the basis of their function and capacity to speak authoritatively about their country's foreign policy to an international audience. As Toal argues, a decisive factor in this regard is the political organisation of the state in question:

If decision-making authority is vested in a single central institution, such as a presidency, the power of that officeholder to determine the geopolitical orientation of a state is considerable. They have the power to creatively synthesize the different traditions in a state's geopolitical culture into specific geopolitical-policy storylines.⁷⁷

Russia and Turkey both fit the above description. Both countries can be considered semi-authoritarian states where decision-making in foreign policy is highly centralised and limited to a very small circle of officials within the central government. In the case of Russia, President Putin has established a 'power vertical' at the top of which he sits, in order to control as many political decisions as possible.⁷⁸ In Turkey, President Erdoğan has consolidated his hold on power over the years and after being elected president in 2014, strove to change the country's constitution in order to introduce a presidential system guaranteeing him wide ranging powers.⁷⁹ In both Russia and Turkey, the current presidents have been an enduring presence and the dominating political figures for the last fifteen years. Their long tenure provides continuity to this research and affects the size of the sample in that the number of officials selected for this research is fairly limited. In the end, the sample selection was reduced to a small number of top officials occupying central functions with regard to the formulation and execution of foreign policy. The two tables below (*Table 2.1* and *Table 2.2*) list their names, functions and dates of their tenure.

Table 2.1 Sample selection: Russian government officials and their function

Name	Function	Date	No. of speeches
Vladimir Putin	President	12/1999-05/2008	42
	Prime minister	05/2008-05/2012	6
	President	05/2012-	34
Dmitry Medvedev	President	05/2008-05/2012	35
	Prime minister	05/2012-	39

⁷⁷ Toal 2017: 40

⁷⁸ Hill and Gaddy 2015; Gill 2016

⁷⁹ Cagaptay 2017

Sergei Ivanov	Minister of defence	03/2001-02/2007	11
Sergey Lavrov	Minister of foreign affairs	03/2004-	113
Igor Ivanov	Minister of foreign affairs	09/1998-02/2004	5
			285

Table 2.2 Sample selection: Turkish government officials and their function

Name	Function	Date	No. of speeches
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	Prime minister	03/2003-08/2014	30
	President	08/2014-	7
Ahmet Necdet Sezer	President	05/2000-08/2007	4
Abdullah Gül	Minister of foreign affairs	03/2003-08/2007	28
	President	08/2007-08/2014	36
Ali Babacan	Minister of foreign affairs	08/2007-05/2009	24
Ahmet Davutoğlu	Advisor to Prime minister	03/2003-05/2009	37
	Minister of foreign affairs	05/2009-08/2014	
	Prime minister	08/2014-05/2016	
Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu	Minister of foreign affairs	08/2014-	5
			175

After selecting the officials whose discourses will be studied, the next question is which texts to read. The focus lies on public discourses, hence public appearances and texts have been chosen. These texts need to convey a sense of the governing elite's geopolitical imagination and also relate to foreign policy. As a result, the sample consisted of public speeches, both domestic and international, lengthy interviews with the media as well as articles written by government officials published in newspapers and journals. On the importance of political speeches, O Tuathail and Agnew note that they 'afford us a means of recovering the self-understandings of influential actors in world politics' and thus contribute to our understanding and uncovering of the country's geopolitical imagination.⁸⁰ A political speech is a specific scripted speech act in which politicians lay out their country's viewpoint, convey messages and important decisions, as well as promote their policies. They take place on a regular basis, which allows for a continuous analysis, including tracing the evolution of

⁸⁰ O Tuathail and Agnew 1992: 191

discourse over time. In most instances, a political speech is written by a number of people on the basis of diverse inputs from within the administration or ministry and thus provides a broad, politically comprehensive spectre. The same applies to an article written by a government official and published in a newspaper or magazine. In addition to speeches, interviews with the media provide the politician with a more flexible format, leaving more room for improvisation and, given the conversational style, more direct statements. They also provide an interlocutor which serves as an opposite and allows them to dramatise the speech act.

In the Russian case, the Foreign Policy Concept additionally serves an important function in outlining the country's foreign policy. The Concept outlines the main axes, regional issues and priorities of Russian foreign policy. For the period under study, three different versions were available (2000, 2008, 2013). These documents are highly valuable in that they provide the blueprint for Russian foreign policy and a synthesised version of the country's geopolitical imagination. These 'canonical texts', as Dunn and Neumann call them, serve as 'anchor points' and objects of reference for other texts such as regular policy speeches.⁸¹ In the case of Russia, they also allow for an observation of the evolution of Russian discourse since the format and structure of the document usually remains the same and thus one can see where variations occur. Hence, these documents have also been included in the sample. Unfortunately, Turkey does not publish a similar official foreign policy concept or white paper. The only text coming close to this form is a regularly updated short synopsis of Turkish foreign policy, outlining in very general terms its main principles, published on the website of the Foreign Ministry.⁸² However, it is not included in the sample because of its changing and unsubstantial nature.

The next step in the process consists of data collection and setting up a data set. For this research, a number of sources were used to collect the speeches and interviews by Russia's and Turkey's governing elite.⁸³ In the case of Russia, most speeches and interviews were derived directly from the official websites (their respective English language version) of the Presidency (<http://en.kremlin.ru/>), the Russian Government

⁸¹ Dunn and Neumann 2016: 93-94

⁸² <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/synopsis-of-the-turkish-foreign-policy.en.mfa>, accessed 1 May 2017.

⁸³ The full list of speeches and interviews, including details on sources, is provided in the reference list and appendix.

(<http://government.ru/en/>), and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (http://www.mid.ru/en/main_en). All the speeches were obtained in English translation, the translations being provided directly by the respective government authority or ministry. In addition, several speeches and interviews were taken directly from the websites of news media, TV stations or think tanks in which the respective speaker appeared. In the case of Turkey, most speeches and interviews were obtained from the websites of the Presidency (<https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/>) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (<http://www.mfa.gov.tr/default.en.mfa>). However, Turkish government offices were less systematic in translating and providing their leaders' speeches on the government's websites.⁸⁴ Hence, a large number of articles, speeches and interviews, especially those given by Prime Minister/President Erdoğan, had to be researched online on a variety of platforms, including directly with the respective media institution or think tank in which the speech was given.

All the speeches and interviews were obtained in their English translation or, in rare cases, the English original. This obviously raises important questions as to the authenticity of the material. As Neumann argues, 'cultural competence' is an important prerequisite when doing discourse analysis.⁸⁵ This is needed in order to situate the research material, understand cultural references and generally grasp the political environment under study. A major limitation of my research thus is that I do not speak Russian and Turkish fluently, which prevented me from reading and analysing all the speeches and interviews in their original language. Therefore, I had to revert to translations into English.

In summary, the data set for the subsequent analysis of Russian and Turkish government discourse on the meaning of Eurasia consists of a sample of a total of 463 speeches, interviews, articles and concepts (see also *Table 2.1* and *Table 2.2*). The Russian sample includes 285 speeches and interviews as well as the three foreign policy concepts covering the period from 2000 (Putin's first election as President) to 2015. The distribution of speeches according to each speaker was as follows: Sergey Lavrov: 113 speeches; Vladimir Putin: 82 speeches; Dmitry Medvedev: 74 speeches;

⁸⁴ A notable exception being the published edition containing the collected speeches from former President Abdullah Gül (Gül 2007), which was an invaluable resource.

⁸⁵ Neumann 2008a: 63-65

Sergey Ivanov: 11 speeches; Igor Ivanov: 5 speeches. We can thus observe that the bulk of the speeches derive from only three politicians, a consequence of the fact that these politicians have been in office for a long time. The Turkish sample is comprised of 175 speeches and interviews ranging from the year 2002 (the AKP won the parliamentary election and Erdoğan became Prime Minister) to the year 2015. Six speakers make up the sample and the distribution of speeches among these politicians is as follows: Abdullah Gül: 64 speeches; Ahmet Davutoğlu: 41 speeches; Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: 37 speeches; Ali Babacan: 24 speeches; Ahmet Necdet Sezer: 5 speeches; Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu: 4 speeches. Again, the foreign ministers account for the highest number of speeches, followed by the long-standing Prime Minister and later President Erdoğan.

2.2.2 Qualitative analysis

For the analysis of the data material, I proceeded in two steps. Before reading the complete set of speeches and interviews, I read a sample of discourses from both case studies in order to identify the principal themes and keywords with regard to geographical and geopolitical assumptions in Russian and Turkish discourse and national identity conceptions. Keeping in mind the general research question which focuses on the importance of Eurasia in Russian and Turkish foreign policy, four broad categories were identified. Each category comprises several key words and jointly they cover the basic conceptions of and references to Eurasia in Russian and Turkish discourse. This thus led to a taxonomy of the dominant themes in Russian and Turkish government discourse on Eurasia, which served as a grid of analysis for the second reading of the collected data (see *Figure 2.2* and *Figure 2.3*). I call this the exploratory grid because it allows for a classification of all the discourses within the four categories along the defined keywords.

Figure 2.2 Exploratory grid I: dominant themes and keywords in Russian discourse

Category 1: Geography <i>Keywords:</i> Centrality; Geopolitical position; Bridge; Duality	Category 2: History <i>Keywords:</i> Historical space; Historic community; Common experience
Category 3: Culture <i>Keywords:</i> Civilisational dialogue; Linguistic ties; Crossroads	Category 4: Economy <i>Keywords:</i> Integration; Regional organisations; Common space; Infrastructure

Figure 2.3 Exploratory grid II: dominant themes and keywords in Turkish discourse

Category 1: Geography <i>Keywords:</i> Centrality; Geostrategic location; Interconnector; Bridge	Category 2: History <i>Keywords:</i> Heritage; Common experience; Imperial legacy
Category 3: Culture <i>Keywords:</i> Heritage; Kinship ties; Linguistic ties	Category 4: Economy <i>Keywords:</i> Energy hub; Transit; Corridor

The entire collection of speeches from Russian and Turkish policy makers was analysed through this grid. Whenever there was a mention of, or reference to, Eurasia in a speech, it was classified in one of the four categories on the basis of the respective keywords. Each category refers to a broad and dominant theme in Russian and Turkish government discourse about Eurasia: geography, history, culture and economy. These categories remain identical for both case studies. Based on a preliminary reading of a sample of discourses, several keywords are defined within each category. These keywords refer to specific characterisations and mentions of Eurasia and its place in Russia's and Turkey's foreign policy in the government elites' discourse. For example, the characterisation of Russia as a Eurasian bridge is part of the first category, 'geography', since it refers primarily to a geographical feature of Eurasia in Russian discourse. On the other hand, the repeated emphasis on Turkey's kinship ties across the Eurasian landmass with the Turkic states of Central Asia is based on a cultural reading of Eurasia's place in Turkish foreign policy. The ensuing detailed analysis of Russia's and Turkey's government elites' discourse on Eurasia in chapters 5 and 6 is structured along the thematic classification as outlined in *Figure 2.2* and *Figure 2.3*. In short, using this exploratory reading grid helps to distil the principal and most prevalent meanings of the concept of Eurasia for Russian and Turkish foreign policy.

This approach has both advantages and inconveniences. In terms of advantages, it allows for a structured and guided analysis of a wide range of material from different actors covering a time period of almost fifteen years. Furthermore, it allows for the comparison of Russian and Turkish discourse, even though the primary nature and objective of this thesis is not the conduct of a comparative study. Finally, given the methodological openness of discourse analysis, it is important that the researcher develops a methodological framework that is consistent and transparent, thus making

the process, and ultimately the results, of the actual analysis intelligible and comprehensible for the reader.⁸⁶

However, such a rigid grid does not allow for a lot of flexibility because it forces the researcher to classify each event according to one of the keywords. Naturally, the boundaries between these categories are fluid and many references to Eurasia in Russian and Turkish discourse refer to multiple categories. For instance, the bridge discourse in Turkey not only refers to Turkey's geographical position between and linking Europe and Asia, thus part of the first category, but also to its role as a mediator between civilisations, which is part of its cultural identity, and thus classified in the third category (*see Figure 2.3*). Given the social nature of this research, this was to be expected and the subsequent analysis takes this into account by linking and synthesising the various meanings and interpretations of Eurasia in Russian and Turkish government discourse.

Following the classification of the discourses along the lines of the above categories, in a second step, an explanatory framework is developed to serve as a guide for the interpretation of the discourses. Discourses by the political elite embed the state's position and its foreign policy in a broader understanding of the global system. Given that this thesis is interested in these states' foreign policies, the starting assumption is that Eurasia is an important concept in Russia's and Turkey's perception of their role in global affairs. However, as has been discussed above, discourses are formative of a state's national identity and provide the boundaries for social practice, thus they function on many levels, both in the domestic as well as foreign realm.

Furthermore, in order to offer an interpretation of Russia's and Turkey's foreign policy practice, four factors or role conceptions, which arise from the governing elites' discourse, have been identified. The four factors are power, identity, role and opportunity. The way in which these factors should be used in interpreting foreign policy is outlined by the following questions. It is important to analyse whether the discourse on Eurasia is related to the issue of power, namely Russia and Turkey as important regional or great powers and whether Eurasia is an inherent part of the

⁸⁶ See also Holzscheiter 2014

country's national identity. Alternatively, this study is also interested in whether the discourse on Eurasia is a pragmatic discourse that evolves around the notion of political and economic opportunities. Furthermore, the study is interested in whether Russia and Turkey see their role in the international system in a way that leads them to formulate certain specific geopolitical images of Eurasia. Or, finally, whether the discourse on Eurasia is all of the above combined. After the analysis of Russian and Turkish discourse in chapters 5 and 6 respectively, the importance and place of these factors in that discourse will be discussed in chapter 7.

As this indicates, this research aims not only to explore the concept of Eurasia in Russian and Turkish government discourse, but to study the concept's place in the country's foreign policy. Proceeding from an exploratory stage to an explanatory stage is to lay the foundation for analysis first before proceeding to a description and interpretation of events. Such a two-step model also allows for tracing 'change over time', that is the evolution of the concept of Eurasia in Russian and Turkish discourse. Given that the exploratory frame remains the same, we can trace how different influencing factors, such as changing national identity conceptions or new economic opportunities, might have influenced Russian and Turkish foreign policy over the years as well as which factor or which factors are dominant at any given time. For this purpose, a chronological description of Russian and Turkish government discourse of Eurasia for the entire period under study, including the most important foreign policy events, is provided in the form of a table (see *Table 5.2* and *Table 6.2*). Likewise, the main analytical chapters of this thesis, focusing on Russian and Turkish discourse on Eurasia, contain a section which traces the evolution of the discourse over time and tries to connect discourse to practice. It is here where my approach mixes critical engagement with the discourse with an explanatory approach attempting to explain foreign policy changes. It thus follows the approach outlined by Thomas Diez, who argues that while the critical engagement with policies and politics is the central aspect of discourse analysis, it nonetheless also offers avenues for the explanation of said policies since discourse also 'provides the context in which individual policy articulations are set'.⁸⁷ This will permit tracing the evolution of Russian and Turkish

⁸⁷ Diez 2014: 28

discourses and see which developments – both domestic and international – have an impact on ideas and subsequent discourses as well as foreign policy practice.

Let me now briefly come back to Neumann's three step model for doing discourse analysis, presented above, which consists of delimiting texts (step 1), mapping representations (step 2) and layering discourses (step 3), and apply it to my research framework in order to summarise my approach.⁸⁸ The first step concerns the question of which texts to study and when and where to stop collecting texts. On the basis of the time frame defined for both the Russian and Turkish case, corresponding to the time in office of Presidents Putin and Erdoğan, a period of fifteen years for Russia and twelve years for Turkey has been studied. Focusing on elite discourse in the realm of foreign policy narrowed down the potential actors whose discourse to study to the top government officials such as head of state and foreign minister. Public speeches, interviews with the media and published articles by government officials were included in the sample since foreign policy discourse is a public undertaking. This approach has resulted in the collection of 463 documents.

The second step consists of mapping representations and identifying which is the dominant representation but also what other representations exist. This thesis is interested in Russian and Turkish government discourse on Eurasia. However, as has been noted, a discourse does not evolve in a vacuum and in the case of Russia and Turkey, the discourse of Eurasia cohabited with discourses on Europe, the Middle East and other geographical regions. One of the key undertakings thus will be to study how the discourse on Eurasia evolved and how it became the dominant discourse, as in Russia's case, or how it lost some of its appeal, as in the case of Turkey.

Finally, in step three, discourses are layered, which means identifying which is the historically most stable or most dominating discourse. Following from what has just been said above, here it is critical to account for other discourses in Turkey and Russia. In the case of Turkey, Eurasia is just one discourse and discourses such as Neo-Ottomanism or Europeanization are also dominant in the public discourse.⁸⁹ With regard to Russia, it is essential also to focus on the discourse on Europe, the Euro-

⁸⁸ Neumann 2008a: 66-73

⁸⁹ See for example Oğuzlu 2008, 2011; Dal 2012; Taşpınar 2012; Macmillan 2013

Atlantic and the Asia-Pacific.⁹⁰ Identifying which is the most stable or dominant discourse is the task of subsequent chapters.

2.2.2.1 Limitations of my approach

At the centre of this thesis are Russia's and Turkey's governing elites or more specifically, a small number of selected policymakers. It is their ideas and geopolitical vision which are being examined here. However, in order to fully understand the complexity of global affairs and analyse all the nuances of foreign policy discourse, a variety of discourses and actors should be studied. As Neumann argues, 'discourses should be accessed at many different points', which means that not only actions of policymakers but also their meaning for the people concerned should be analysed.⁹¹ Indeed, focusing on government discourse provides a singular point of view and neglects other forms of discourse, such as popular or academic discourses, which are needed to paint a comprehensive picture of a country's geopolitical imagination. With regard to Russia, there is a wide variety of scholarship focusing on other actors such as students, academics, and the general public.⁹² The literature on Turkish foreign policy is overwhelmingly focused on the elite discourse and practical geopolitical analyses,⁹³ although Bilgin provides an analysis of the geopolitical ideas and their influence by military actors and academics.⁹⁴ The interesting aspect with regard to analyses of formal geopolitics (academic discourses) in Turkey is that one of its most prominent proponents, Ahmet Davutoğlu, moved from the realm of formal geopolitics, being an academic, to the realm of practical geopolitics, becoming the country's Foreign Minister in 2009.⁹⁵

It is thus clear that elite discourse not only has an influence on the state's identity and foreign policy, but also that the viewpoint and emotions of the population are

⁹⁰ See for example Baranovsky 2000; Rangsimaporn 2006; Kuhrt 2012; Sakwa 2012; Neumann 2016

⁹¹ Neumann 2008a: 76

⁹² Müller (2009), Mäkinen (2016) and Kasamara and Sorokina (2017), with different methodologies, all focus on the geopolitical imagination of university students in Russia, while Tsygankov (2003) reviews the geopolitical arguments as expressed by select academics. Finally, O'Loughlin and Talbot (2005) and O'Loughlin, O Tuathail and Kolossov (2005, 2006) study the geopolitical perceptions of ordinary Russians through large-scale public opinion surveys.

⁹³ Yanik 2009; Yeşiltaş 2013; Başer 2015

⁹⁴ Bilgin 2007, 2012

⁹⁵ Erşen 2014b. In this study, the focus is almost exclusively on Davutoğlu's writings and speeches as politician and his academic work is only treated in passing.

significant. That is to say that discourses do not exist in a vacuum and are mutually constitutive. Hence, one should aim to include as many actors and viewpoints as possible in order to provide a complete picture. However, for practical reasons and questions of scope, such an approach is rarely feasible. In this research, I chose to focus on government elite discourse because foreign policy tends to be primarily defined within the inner realms of central governments.⁹⁶ Therefore, this thesis concentrates on and remains within the limited realm of policymakers and their discourses.

2.2.3 Fieldwork/Interviews

In addition to the speeches and interviews from Russia's and Turkey's principal political leaders, which formed the overwhelming part of the data analysed in this thesis, a number of personal interviews with Russian and Turkish academics, think tank analysts and diplomats have been conducted. The interviews were semi-structured, relying on a set of prepared questions, while leaving room for both the interviewer and the interviewee to delve into other subjects.⁹⁷ All the interviews were conducted personally over a period of six months in Turkey (Ankara and Istanbul) and Russia (Moscow) during my research stays at Bilkent University in Ankara from January to March 2015 and the Higher School of Economics in Moscow from April to June 2015. In total, I conducted 22 interviews (12 in Turkey and 10 in Russia), primarily with academics and think tankers. For the purpose of utmost openness and upon request of most of the interviewees, anonymity was guaranteed to all interlocutors and their statements are reproduced here by providing only a general description of their respective professional position.

The initial motivation for doing qualitative interviews with policy-makers, and to a lesser extent with scholars, was to add an additional perspective to the exhaustive amount of primary data already collected, namely the speeches and interviews from government officials. The list of questions prepared for the interviews reflected the general research questions guiding this project. Since my methodological framework was already elaborated and the principal themes and issues in Russian and Turkish

⁹⁶ Hill 2003: 55-56

⁹⁷ The list of prepared questions is provided in the appendix. Some inspiration for doing fieldwork and interviews in Russia has been drawn from Richardson 2014.

discourse on Eurasia identified, I could thus ask specific questions focusing on these themes and issues. My hope was to move beyond the publicly available discourse and get a deeper sense of the meaning of Eurasia for Russia's and Turkey's governing elite. Therefore, the aim was to conduct the interviews in an informal setting so that they would provide a conducive environment for an open and frank conversation. However, when I started organising the interviews in Turkey and Russia, I quickly realised that my aims were too ambitious, for reasons which are outlined below.

Every researcher attempting to conduct interviews will be faced with a number of challenges.⁹⁸ In my case, three particular challenges can be highlighted: access, openness, and immersion. One of the principal challenges, especially when doing research on foreign policy and practical geopolitics which focuses on the top government officials, is access. Whereas it is relatively simple and straightforward to obtain meetings and interviews with academics and think tank representatives, the same is not true for government officials. Despite contacts with diplomats from both the Russian and Turkish foreign ministry, I was not able to organise a significant number of interviews with policy-makers beyond a couple of informal meetings. There are two aspects to this challenge. First, many government officials and diplomats prefer not to talk openly about their work to a researcher. This seems especially true in countries like Turkey and Russia, where the governments are keen on controlling the flow of information. Second, as a doctoral researcher, one often lacks the necessary credentials or societal position to obtain meetings with high-ranking officials.⁹⁹ In general, access to the right interlocutors is one of the biggest challenges for any researcher doing interviews and needs to be taken into consideration when designing the research. Therefore I had to change strategy and focus almost exclusively on doing interviews with academics and think tank analysts. While the prepared questions remained the same, the answers and ultimately the outcome of the interviews was more analytical. As a result, I chose not to add the interviews to the sample of collected speeches and interviews by government officials and subject it to the same methodological reading. Instead, the interviews were used to emphasise certain

⁹⁸ For a concise overview of approaches to and challenges of elite interviews, see Richards 1996; Harvey 2011.

⁹⁹ This I personally experienced when a senior official working for the protocol division of the Russian foreign ministry explained to me that meeting with (senior) diplomats was impossible due to my position as a junior researcher.

elements in Russian and Turkish discourse on Eurasia or to provide an additional comment on ideas outlined in official discourse.

A further challenge for the researcher conducting interviews with policy-makers and foreign policy analysts is to get the interviewee to speak as openly as possible and not merely repeat the standard government position. In countries like Russia and Turkey, where the government controls many areas of opinion building, this is an additional challenge and many interlocutors, despite being critical of government action, will not make openly critical statements in an interview.

Finally, a third challenge for the researcher engaging in discourse analysis and interviews is proximity to the subject and/or immersion in the subject. This is especially true for the researcher engaged in an analysis of practical geopolitics since, as O Tuathail argues, ‘it requires near total immersion in the everyday world of foreign policy discourse and practice. Researchers need to become ethnographers of foreign policy behavior, yet without ever having direct access to the micro-world of their subjects’.¹⁰⁰ As a result, what remains are the speeches and interviews from top government officials provided either through official channels or the media. Therefore, one has to work with what there is and focus on the essential which is the text.

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter laid out the main concepts and ideas providing the basis for the subsequent analysis of Russian and Turkish government elite discourse on Eurasia. This thesis is based on a critical geopolitical framework, which is particularly well-suited to investigate how political elites infuse meaning into geography and make sense of the world surrounding them. In its essence, critical geopolitics focuses on how ‘global space is incessantly reimagined and rewritten by centers of power and authority’.¹⁰¹ It furthermore ‘investigates how geographical claims and assumptions function in political debates and political practice’.¹⁰² The notion of discourse and the power of speech are central to critical geopolitics. The main approach selected herein

¹⁰⁰ O Tuathail 2002: 605

¹⁰¹ O Tuathail 1996: 249

¹⁰² Kuus 2010: 683

is the strand of practical geopolitics, which focuses on state officials and the highest echelons of power. As a result, foreign policy practice is an equally important object of study as elite discourse. This leads to one of the core formulas underlying this research, which is the interdependent nature of foreign policy discourse and geopolitical imaginations.

Discourse analysis is a central element of critical geopolitical scholarship. Studying the way in which actors make sense of the world, how they make reference to existing discourses and attribute meaning to places, is a first step in trying to understand a country's foreign policy and its position in global politics. Discourse analysis as a method offers many advantages but also challenges, which need to be mediated, not least in terms of data selection and interpretation. The methodological framework elaborated in this thesis accounts for these complexities by proposing a discourse analysis consisting of two steps: first an exploratory and then an explanatory phase. In subsequent chapters (Chapters 5 and 6), the discourse of Russia's and Turkey's government elites with regard to Eurasia will be analysed on the basis of this framework. In order to further prepare the groundwork before moving on to the main analytical part of this thesis, the next chapters will provide more general discussions on the subject of contemporary Russian and Turkish foreign policy (Chapter 3) as well as on the concept of Eurasia, both in general as well as specifically in the case of Russia and Turkey (Chapter 4).

Chapter 3: Russian and Turkish foreign policy since the 1990s

This chapter aims to provide a brief and concise overview of Russian and Turkish foreign policy since the 1990s. While it engages with the existing literature on Russian and Turkish foreign policy, the chapter follows a chronological structure describing the evolution and major changes in the two countries' foreign policy. For Russia, the main focus lies on the period starting in 2000, with Putin's accession to the presidency, and the Turkey section concentrates on foreign policy developments following the AKP's first parliamentary victory and designation of Erdoğan as prime minister in 2002.

The first half of the chapter is dedicated to Russia. The first section briefly looks back at the foreign policy during the first decade of the newly independent Russian Federation, which was characterised by domestic instability and changing foreign policy orientations. Thereafter, the focus turns to foreign policy under Putin from 2000 to 2015, including the Medvedev presidency from 2008 to 2012. It is argued that after a brief phase of Westernisation, the principal goal of Putin was to restore Russia's place in the international system as an important and respected actor or, put differently, a great power. This not only meant expanding Russia's influence in the post-Soviet space but increasingly also countering what was seen as the West's and NATO's expansion as well as US unilateral actions globally. Following his return to the presidency in 2012, Putin quickly started implementing his plans for the establishment of a Eurasian (Economic) Union which would provide an institutional framework for integration in the post-Soviet space and help cement Russia's role as the regional hegemon. Furthermore, relations with the West further plummeted due to the Ukraine crisis in 2014 and attempts at diversifying Russia's foreign policy options, including a supposed turn to the Asian vector, became central elements of Russian foreign policy. The last section then discusses the key concepts and ideas which build the foundation for Russian foreign policy, namely great power status, multipolarity and sovereignty.

The second half of the chapter focuses on Turkish foreign policy. It starts with a discussion of the structural determinants of Turkish foreign policy, such as the legacies of the Ottoman Empire and Atatürk's rule, as well as Turkey's geopolitical realities. The chapter then turns to a brief overview of the 1990s, a period which was

characterised by political instability in the domestic context and a sudden opening up of Turkey's geographical environment, thus creating new options in the foreign policy realm. The third section examines the evolution of Ankara's foreign policy under the new AKP government, which offered a new vision and role for the country as a regional power, on the basis of being the leader of its civilisational basin, striving for more influence at the global level. While accession to the European Union (EU) remained a major goal in the early years, a diversification of Turkish foreign policy, including a turn to the Middle East, followed in the later years around 2007-2009. One of the principal architects of the new Turkish foreign policy was Ahmet Davutoğlu, a professor of international relations who was an advisor to Prime Minister Erdoğan before becoming foreign minister and finally prime minister himself. His strategic depth theory focused on Turkey's historical and geographical characteristics as determinants of Turkey's position as a central country in global affairs. As a consequence, Turkish foreign policy should be active with the aim of establishing Turkey as the regional leader and a global influencer.

The last part of the chapter briefly looks at the historically confrontational relationship between Russia and Turkey and how it evolved over the years leading to a pragmatic and cooperative bilateral relation. The chapter proceeds chronologically describing first Russia's and then Turkey's foreign policy. However, the chapter is not intended as a pure chronological description of events in both countries but rather as a background to the subsequent discussion of Russian and Turkish discourse on Eurasia. Hence, I aim at describing the key thinking and elements of Russian and Turkish foreign policy throughout the last two decades or so. This review chapter is principally based on secondary literature and is intended to provide an overview, lacking, due to space constraints, a detailed historical discussion of Russian and Turkish foreign policy as well as their experience as imperial centres of the Russian Empire/Soviet Union and Ottoman Empire, respectively.

3.1 Russian foreign policy in the post-Cold War era

3.1.1 Russian foreign policy, 1991-2000

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the emergence of fifteen newly independent states from its ruins had far-reaching consequences, both regionally and

globally. For Russia, as the legal successor of the USSR and by far the most powerful of the Soviet successor states, this meant a new start with different premises. Whereas a lot of the Soviet Union's material assets and international obligations remained in Russia's hands, its ideology and statehood were gone. According to Ted Hopf, in that moment 'Russia found itself between two different modern identities – that of the Soviet past and that of the western present' – forming the background against which its current leadership had to define a new identity.¹ This opened the floor for debate among the many political factions about the meaning of the Russian state, its place in the world and who its friends and enemies were.

Russia's first post-Soviet president, Boris Yeltsin, was one of the principal actors who helped trigger the breakup of the Soviet Union and thus contributed to the emergence of the Russian Federation as an independent state.² As Arbatov argued, during the first year of Yeltsin's presidency, there was a clear lack of a defined national identity and Russian foreign policy was thus in flux.³ Several observers argue that given the fact that Russia's new national identity following the collapse of the Soviet Union was being debated, there was infighting among different factions of Russia's political elite, each with its own ideological viewpoints, about the future course of the country.⁴

Russian foreign policy in the 1990s can roughly be divided into two phases. First, under Andrei Kozyrev as foreign minister, Russia had a pro-Western approach and aimed at integrating with the West and Western institutions.⁵ According to Andrei Tsygankov, the civilisational idea of the 'West' was prevalent during Andrei Kozyrev's term as foreign minister in the early years of Russia's independence from 1991 to 1993. It reflected a view of Russia as essentially a part of the Western civilisation with the aim of fully integrating Russia with the West.⁶ As Aron argues, around 1993, a set of commonly accepted foreign policy assumptions (a 'tripartite strategic agenda') emerged within the Yeltsin presidency. This agenda consisted of

¹ Hopf 2002: 155-156

² See Shevtsova 1999 for an overview of the Yeltsin presidency.

³ Arbatov 1993

⁴ Buszynski 1996: 1-28; Larrabee and Karasik 1997.

⁵ Donaldson and Noguee 2005: 124-126; Tsygankov 2007: 383

⁶ Tsygankov 2007: 382-388

‘nuclear superpowership, regional dominance, and the acceptance of a diminished global status, and, with it, the engagement in the world as one of the great powers’.⁷

Thereafter followed the second phase, which represented a slight departure from the previously overly pro-Western stance. The deterioration of the economic situation in Russia combined with a general disappointment with the West due to the latter’s reluctance to integrate Russia, benefited the nationalistic domestic opposition, which then went on to score higher results and gain more seats in the 1993 Duma elections than the pro-government parties. According to Valdez, all of this compelled Yeltsin to alter his foreign policy.⁸ Furthermore, as Tsygankov argued, domestic instability and the first Chechen war in 1994, as well as Western policies such as the decision to expand NATO eastwards benefited the statist coalition in Russia.⁹ As a result, Yeltsin nominated Yevgeny Primakov as foreign minister in 1996. Primakov saw Russia as a Eurasian great power opposed to Western dominance and especially the United States’ unilateralism and attempts to enlarge NATO. Generally, he favoured a more assertive and multi-vector foreign policy that would see Russia increasingly engaging with other regions such as the Middle East and East Asia. Hence, Tsygankov identifies Primakov’s policies as being influenced by the civilisational idea of ‘Eurasia’ understood as the opposite of the West, considering Russia’s spatial belonging to be located in the East and Asia.¹⁰

In general, the 1990s were seen in Russia as a chaotic period, defined by political and economic instability. According to Bobo Lo, uncertainty and inconsistency were the defining features of Russia’s post-independence foreign policy, which was additionally dominated by short-term strategic thinking instead of long-term considerations. As Lo further argues, given that Russia lacked clearly defined national interests which it could pursue strategically, it preferred to act in the short term by simply reacting to emerging developments instead of developing a coherent strategy.¹¹

⁷ Aron 1998: 51

⁸ Valdez 1995: 94

⁹ Tsygankov 2016c: 97-98

¹⁰ Tsygankov 2007: 382-388

¹¹ Lo 2002: 102

The principal reason therefore, as Lo notes, was the absence of a clear ‘consensus as to either Russia’s identity or the nature of the post-Cold War environment’.¹²

3.1.2 Russian foreign policy under Putin, 2000-2008

Vladimir Putin became Russian president in 2000, after having briefly served as prime minister in 1999, and as acting president following Boris Yeltsin’s early resignation. In general, different observers argue that Putin was responsible for implementing a new approach to Russian foreign policy and restoring Russia’s ‘place’ in global affairs, thus ending the years of unstable foreign policy-making characteristic of the Yeltsin years.¹³ As Richard Sakwa notes, the recollection of the instability and chaos experienced by Russians in the early years of the newly established Russian federation became an important part of Putin’s political project to promote his rule and depict him as having restored order and Russia’s rightful place in the world.¹⁴ Still, Grachev argues that during Putin’s first term (2000-2004), his foreign policy lacked a clear direction and was characterised by ‘political manoeuvring’ in order to consolidate domestic and foreign policies after the chaotic years of the Yeltsin presidency.¹⁵ During this time, when Igor Ivanov served as foreign minister, Russian foreign policy was characterised by Russian attempts to foster a strategic partnership with the EU and hints at better cooperation with the US (despite being a strong critic of NATO actions and bombings in Yugoslavia in 1999). For instance, as Stent noted, in a highly symbolic act, Putin was the first world leader to call US President Bush after the 9/11 attacks and promised Russian cooperation in the ensuing war on terror, including not opposing the installation of US military bases in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia.¹⁶ However, this foreign policy proved to be rather short-lived. Putin’s second term, starting in 2004, saw the implementation of a new foreign policy vision. Sakwa termed this foreign policy approach the ‘new realism’.¹⁷ Sakwa argues that Putin’s ‘new realist’ foreign policy vision can be characterised by seven features: first, ‘economisation’ which means that domestic economic interests determine foreign policy; second, ‘Europeanisation’ which consisted of integrating Russia into the Euro-

¹² Lo 2002: 25-26

¹³ Rumer 2007: 7-8; Sakwa 2008: 242

¹⁴ Sakwa 2015c: 3

¹⁵ Grachev 2005: 260

¹⁶ Stent 2014: 49-81

¹⁷ Sakwa 2007; Sakwa 2008

Atlantic bloc; third, 'securitisation', that is the importance of national and territorial security; fourth, 'autonomy' as a fully-fledged global actor; fifth, relations with other states would rather take place on a bilateral basis emphasised by good personal ties; sixth, 'constrained great powerism' (*Derzhavnost*) on the basis of cooperation with the West but as an independent international power; and, finally, the normalisation of relations with the West.¹⁸

In general, Spechler argues that during his second term, Putin adopted a more assertive stance in foreign policy.¹⁹ This was epitomized by his famous discourse at the Munich security conference in 2007, in which he rejected the current international system dominated by the United States and its liberal, Western ideology while promoting the idea of a multipolar global order.²⁰ A number of events provoked in Putin a sense of rejection and perceived lack of respect by the West for Russian interests. The continued enlargement of NATO (and to a much lesser degree that of the EU), which also included states bordering Russia, was seen as a threat by Moscow and as a failure to live up to the assurances supposedly given by Western leaders in 1990, that NATO would not enlarge. Over subsequent years, this proved to be a sustained point of contention between Russia and Western states, each promoting a diverging interpretation of the matter. While Russia insists that the West issued assurances to Russia that NATO would not expand any further eastwards after the reunification of Germany, Western leaders and NATO argue that no such assurances were given.²¹ Thus a seed was planted for the eventual degradation of relations between Russia and the West, culminating in the Ukraine crisis.²² Another issue which strongly alienated Russia was the so-called Bush doctrine and the United States' unilateral military action against Iraq, bypassing the UN security council.²³ In addition, the colour revolutions in the post-Soviet space, the Rose revolution in Georgia in 2003, the Orange revolution

¹⁸ Sakwa 2007: 8-11

¹⁹ Spechler 2010: 37

²⁰ Lukyanov 2010: 26-27. See Putin 2007b for the complete speech.

²¹ Diverging views exist on this matter. Sarotte (2014), for instance, argues that while the topic of future NATO enlargement and eastward expansion and its restriction to the exclusive inclusion of Eastern Germany (but no other former Warsaw Pact states) was raised in talks between Western and Soviet leaders, in the end no official or written promises were made. On the other hand, Shiffrinson (2016) argues that the issue of NATO enlargement was raised extensively in talks between the US and the Soviet Union and that US officials did indeed offer the Soviet Union informal assurances against further eastward NATO enlargement.

²² For a comprehensive discussion of this issue, see Sakwa 2017: 77-90.

²³ Stent 2014: 82

in 2004 in Ukraine and the Tulip revolution in 2005 in Kyrgyzstan, startled Russia by demonstrating the instability of its neighbourhood and the influence of Western actors there.²⁴

There is widespread agreement that under Putin's leadership, in contrast to the 1990s, Russian foreign policy was consolidated. Still, assessments about the extent to which Putin managed this consolidation differ. Stent, for instance, argues that 'under Putin, Russia developed a new national idea, largely based on traditional nationalism and the Orthodox Church' which would guide Russian foreign policy,²⁵ while Averre argues that Russian politics were less guided by a coherent ideology than by external circumstances such as the formation of the new world order following the United States' relative decline, as well as a sharp increase in energy prices.²⁶ As Sussex notes, it is clear that the – in Russia's view – fortunate development of global energy prices provided Russia with the necessary material capacities to support and implement its foreign policy.²⁷ Increasing energy prices provided Russia with the necessary means to adopt a more assertive foreign policy. The economic factor in Russian foreign policy thus became more important, leading to what Wallander termed 'transimperialism', namely a system in which rent-seeking among Russia's elite and the search for possibilities to advance Russia's economic interests in the global economy have become priorities in Russian foreign policy.²⁸ In general, Russia's leaders were convinced that Russia's place in the world was as a great power among others which would help maintain the current order and shape new ideas for the future.²⁹

As we have seen earlier, one of the initial problematic issues in Russian foreign policy was the absence of a clearly formulated strategy, and more importantly, its lack of consistency and continuity. According to Spechler, also during Putin's first eight years in office, Russian governmental political thinking changed rather frequently from an originally quite liberal framework to an increasingly assertive and activist position.³⁰ Notwithstanding these frequent changes in posture, Matthew Sussex argues that at its

²⁴ Wilson 2010

²⁵ Stent 2008: 1090

²⁶ Averre 2008: 35

²⁷ Sussex 2012: 209

²⁸ Wallander 2007: 119-120

²⁹ Monaghan 2008

³⁰ Spechler 2010: 40

base Russian foreign policy remained the same, ‘because its national interests – to secure the post-Soviet space, to generate economic prosperity and to become a member of prestigious international institutions and organizations – have also remained largely unchanged’.³¹ In sum, Stent characterised Putin’s foreign policy as one of both ‘restoration and revolution’ based on the premise that as a ‘key actor’ in global affairs Russia needed an open and diverse foreign policy.³² Furthermore, as Mankoff highlights, Putin’s pragmatic foreign policy was subordinated to his overall policy vision, namely the re-emergence of Russia as an influential great power in international affairs.³³

3.1.3 Russian foreign policy under Medvedev, 2008-2012

After two consecutive terms as president, Vladimir Putin was barred by the constitution from running again for the presidency in 2008. He did however select a successor, Dmitry Medvedev, who in turn promised to offer Putin the position of prime minister in case he was elected. Medvedev was clearly Putin’s candidate being bound to him by friendship and not being a member of any of the opposing factions among the Kremlin elite. Hence, as Sakwa argues, ‘the choice of Medvedev was a way of shaping Putin’s legacy’.³⁴ In 2008, Medvedev was duly elected as Russian president and Putin became prime minister, marking the debut of what would become known as the Putin-Medvedev tandem. Instead of changing something to the power structure within the Russian government, Shevtsova and Kramer argued that this arrangement demonstrated that it was Putin who remained the main power holder.³⁵

Pacer argues that the arrangement between Putin and Medvedev with regard to foreign policy was that the latter was in charge, and indeed Medvedev did differ in some respects from his predecessor, not only in rhetoric but also in his approach to Euro-Atlantic security for instance.³⁶ According to Pacer, Medvedev painted an image of Russia as a cooperative security actor by proposing a new European security architecture and under his leadership Russia abstained from vetoing the UN security

³¹ Sussex 2012: 216

³² Stent 2008

³³ Mankoff 2009

³⁴ Sakwa 2011: 269-274

³⁵ Shevtsova and Kramer 2012.

³⁶ Pacer 2016

council decision to intervene militarily in Libya in 2011.³⁷ Nevertheless, Tsygankov argued that on the whole Medvedev's presidency can be seen as a continuation of Putin's policies – although Putin and Medvedev differed in style, they did not differ in their strategic outlook for Russia.³⁸ This becomes evident when looking at the five principles of Russian foreign policy outlined by Medvedev in an interview with three Russian TV channels in 2008. These five principles were: firstly, the primacy of international law; secondly, the promotion of a multipolar order and refutation of US unilateralism; thirdly, the principle of developing friendly relations with other states; fourthly, the absolute protection of the rights and the well-being of Russian citizens abroad; and, fifthly, the fact that Russia had 'privileged interests' in certain regions, which 'are home to countries with which we share special historical relations'.³⁹ Russian foreign policy principles under Putin as president would not have looked very different. In the end, however, according to Lukyanov, despite Medvedev's pro-European rhetoric, his policies did not lead to any meaningful rapprochement with the West and actually prepared the ground for the ensuing stand-off between Russia and the West, which fully took off after Putin returned to the presidency in 2012.⁴⁰

An assessment of Medvedev's foreign policy reveals that he was successful in promoting an image of Russia as an influential regional (and thus global) power and in preventing the further expansion of Western institutions into the post-Soviet space. The 2008 war in Georgia, which was Medvedev's first foreign political endeavour as president, prevented any long-term prospect of Georgia joining NATO and effectively halted further NATO enlargement. Thereafter, Medvedev proposed the establishment of a new European Security Treaty, replacing the existing security architecture of the Euro-Atlantic space (which was perceived as excluding Russia).⁴¹ While the reaction from Western states was overwhelmingly negative, this proposal demonstrated Russia's willingness and its assertiveness in becoming a crucial player in European security. Hence, although being considered a Western-leaning, modernising liberal, Medvedev's policies on the international scene did not represent a rupture with

³⁷ Pacer 2016: 190-195

³⁸ Tsygankov 2011: 33

³⁹ Medvedev 2008b. See also Duncan 2013

⁴⁰ Lukyanov 2012

⁴¹ Lo 2009

previous policies but rather a ‘period of stabilisation’, as Lukyanov demonstrated.⁴² This is not surprising given the fact that Putin remained the most influential politician in Russia during this period and that after all Medvedev’s political upbringing took place under the wings of Putin.

Indeed, in 2011 the decision was taken between Putin and Medvedev to reverse their roles for the upcoming presidential election. Putin thus presented himself as candidate for the presidency while publicly stating that he would offer the position of prime minister to Medvedev if elected. According to Trenin, Putin took the decision to return to the presidency following an assessment of Medvedev’s foreign policy. Despite having achieved major objectives, such as halting NATO enlargement, finalising Russia’s entry into the WTO or promoting further integration in the post-Soviet space, Putin viewed Medvedev’s foreign policy negatively, especially the failure of Medvedev’s European security treaty proposal and general rapprochement with the West and the failure of Russia to veto the UN security council resolution of March 2011 to establish a no-fly zone in Libya.⁴³ This context is important for the subsequent analysis of Putin’s third presidential term. As Trenin argued, upon evaluating Medvedev’s policies, Putin came to the conclusion that the West was not interested in cooperating with Russia on an equal level but only on terms decided upon in the West.⁴⁴ This resentment with Western policies led Putin to adopt a more confrontational stance towards the West, which he considered to be hostile to Russia’s interests.

3.1.4 Russian foreign policy under Putin 2.0

As already argued, Medvedev and Putin did not differ in their principal foreign policy outlook which was the establishment of Russia as an independent power centre in global affairs combined with the rejection of a unipolar world order dominated by the US. According to Trenin, the Medvedev presidency was a sort of ‘scouting mission to the West’ in which Putin left Medvedev the foreign policy lead for the latter to attempt to improve relations with the West. However, Putin’s assessment with regard to Russia-West relations after the Medvedev presidency was hardly positive in that he

⁴² Lukyanov 2012

⁴³ Trenin 2014: 4-6

⁴⁴ Trenin 2014: 4-6

concluded that Western partners still did not respect Russia's interests.⁴⁵ After his return to the presidency, Putin thus formulated three new 'pivots' in Russian foreign policy. The first one was a 'pivot to itself', meaning the consolidation of Russian domestic politics under Putin's control while shielding the country from foreign influence. The second was a pivot to Eurasia in the form of the proposed Eurasian (Economic) Union (EAEU), which was eventually implemented in 2015.⁴⁶ Finally, the third pivot was towards Asia with the aim to foster better ties with China and to develop Russia's Far Eastern regions and Siberia economically.⁴⁷ In short, according to Trenin, the key goal of Russian foreign policy was to achieve 'full sovereignty' for the country, meaning that Russia would be able to pursue its national interests abroad and to prevent other states from interfering in its domestic affairs.⁴⁸

Yet, establishing Russia as a major power and being able to confront the US as an equal, also required that Russia better define what its identity was. Indeed, as Linde and also Hill argue, Putin's return to the presidency in 2012 led to a 'civilisational turn' in Russian foreign policy in which Putin defined Russia as an independent civilisational pole.⁴⁹ According to Tsygankov, three factors are behind this development: 'the West's continued global assertion of its values, the rise of non-Western nations, and Russia's ongoing domestic crisis'.⁵⁰ Partly due to the inability to reform and modernise the Russian economy, but mainly due to the brokered power succession and return of Putin to the presidency, in combination with electoral fraud during the 2011 Duma elections, massive protests against the Russian government erupted in several Russian cities (for which Putin blamed the US). In addition to a generally more critical tone emanating from the West and attempts to support the protesters, Putin increasingly turned against the West. Keeping with the overall policy of establishing Russia as a major centre of power in global affairs, Tsygankov notes that Putin chose to add a culturally and ideologically defined vision of Russia as a distinctive country.⁵¹ According to Trenin, Putin redefined the answers to the questions of what Russia was and what it wanted to do. Hence, Putin defined Russia as a 'distinct

⁴⁵ Trenin 2015b: 30-31

⁴⁶ See also Duncan 2015

⁴⁷ Trenin 2015b: 33

⁴⁸ Trenin 2014: 4

⁴⁹ Linde 2016; Hill 2015: 45

⁵⁰ Tsygankov 2016c: 234

⁵¹ Tsygankov 2016c: 237

civilization’ on the basis of the Russian world notion and argued that Russia should be ‘the centrepiece of a large geoeconomic unit’.⁵²

One of the primary areas of focus of Russian foreign policy during Putin’s third term was the issue of Eurasian integration. In one of several policy articles describing his political programme and published before his election as president, Putin outlined his vision of a Eurasian Union.⁵³ This new union went further than any previous integration structures in the post-Soviet space with the aim to establish a political and economic union akin to the EU.⁵⁴ Putin, in his article, called it an ‘integration project for the 21st century’ whose principal goal was to build a ‘powerful supranational association capable of becoming one of the poles in the modern world and serving as an efficient bridge between Europe and the dynamic Asia-Pacific region’.⁵⁵ Indeed, this union distinguished itself from previous attempts to deepen regional integration by the speed and determination of its founding member to establish a legal and institutional framework, including a Eurasian commission and Eurasian court.⁵⁶

While Putin’s project of a Eurasian Union was initially seen as an open initiative embedded in the discourse of regional integration and economic cooperation, it increasingly came to be seen as a further step in Russia’s alienation from the West. This was mainly due to the simultaneously evolving crisis in neighbouring Ukraine starting at the end of 2013, which poisoned relations and led to the biggest crisis between Russia and the West since the end of the Cold War. However, Russia’s actions in response to the events in Ukraine, including the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and military support for the separatists in Eastern Ukraine, can be viewed as the logical conclusion of the Russian world view under Putin. On the basis of the cornerstones of Russian foreign policy under Putin, such as the restoration of Russia as a great power, the unconditional defence of Russia’s national interests, especially in the post-Soviet space, and the continued sense of rejection by the West, Russian

⁵² Trenin 2014: 9-10. See Zevelev 2014 for a discussion of the Russian World concept and how it became an important notion in Russian foreign policy during Putin’s third term, especially with regard to the Ukraine crisis.

⁵³ Putin 2011

⁵⁴ A more detailed analysis and interpretation of the Eurasian Economic Union, its geopolitical and historical context as well as its political implications is presented in chapter four.

⁵⁵ Putin 2011

⁵⁶ Dragneva and Wolczuk 2014

intervention in Ukraine seemed inevitable. As Tsygankov argues, ‘the West’s lack of recognition for Russia’s values and interests in Eurasia, on the one hand, and the critically important role that Ukraine played in the Kremlin’s foreign policy calculations, on the other’, were the sources behind Russia’s actions in Ukraine.⁵⁷ According to Götz, however, geopolitical considerations such as Russia’s strategic and military goals of preventing Ukraine from joining a military alliance and protecting Russia’s Western flank provide the best explanation for Russia’s actions in Ukraine.⁵⁸ Furthermore, based on an analysis of Russian discourse over the last twenty-five years, Hopf argues that Ukraine was always presented as a crucial component of the ‘Slavic family’ and thus also a natural member of all regional organisations under Russian leadership.⁵⁹ In the context of Russia’s civilisational turn, in which Russia increasingly defined itself as a civilisational pole apart from Europe, Ukraine’s importance for Russia increased. As Hopf noted, ‘Ukraine was becoming an increasingly intrinsic constitutive part of the Russian Self, one whose separation from Russia was increasingly understood as unnatural, unthinkable, and, indeed, dangerous’.⁶⁰ Therefore, the Russian reaction to the crisis in Ukraine and the overthrow of the Ukrainian President Yanukovich was determined and substantial in making sure that Russian interests were defended. The Ukraine crisis thus also demonstrated the importance of Russia’s new civilisational discourse permeating Russian foreign policy under Putin.

The simultaneous developments of promoting further Eurasian integration and establishing the EAEU in combination with the Ukraine crisis and the subsequent rift in Russia-West relations were significant in cementing Russia’s foreign policy vision with regard to Eurasia. They reinforced Putin’s ambition to position Russia as a Eurasian power at the centre of the vast Eurasian region and thus an important global player tantamount to other states such as the US and China.⁶¹ Overall, Russian foreign policy since Putin returned to the presidency in 2012 was based on the traditional principles on which Russian foreign policy rests, namely multipolarity, great power

⁵⁷ Tsygankov 2015: 280

⁵⁸ E. Götz 2015

⁵⁹ Hopf 2016

⁶⁰ Hopf 2016: 248

⁶¹ Svarin 2016

status and sovereignty. These fundamental principles will be examined in the next section.

3.1.5 Principles of Russian foreign policy

Many analysts argue that among the underlying principles of Russian foreign policy, the quest for great power status has been a constant feature of Russian politics and foreign policy for the last two centuries.⁶² This idea is based on a historical identity constructed on the image of Russia as a strong and powerful state, a full member of the international community of states and an influential force in global developments. Hence, as Lo argues, the status of great power is assumed to be a permanent and natural attribute of a country the size and historical stature of Russia independent from the actual political and economic situation of the country.⁶³ As a consequence, Moscow should implement a foreign policy which cements Russia's image as an independent pole and one of the principal actors in global politics. The foreign policy concept of 2013 clearly states that one of the principal goals of Russian foreign policy is 'securing its high standing in the international community as one of the influential and competitive poles in the modern world'.⁶⁴

The preoccupation with status and the role which has been conferred upon Russia by its history and geography is understood by many analysts to be an elementary characteristic of Russian foreign policy. Especially in the post-Soviet period, when the dissolution of the Soviet Union led to debates about Russia's identity, the idea of Russia as a great power was one of the undisputed principals Russia inherited from the Soviet Union. As a result, Clunan argues that post-Soviet Russian foreign policy was built on ideas of status rather than on an objective assessment of Russia's material conditions and rational interests.⁶⁵ The word used in Russia to describe this phenomenon is *derzhavnost*, 'referring to a preoccupation with great power status regardless of whether Russia has the military and economic wherewithal'.⁶⁶ As Smith highlights, Russia's quest for great power status is thus based on 'an emotion, it is a craving for a status that most Russians strongly believe is theirs by right, by virtue of

⁶² Tsygankov 2005; Neumann 2008b; Mankoff 2009

⁶³ Lo 2015: 48

⁶⁴ Russian Federation 2013

⁶⁵ Clunan 2009: 206–207

⁶⁶ Welch Larson and Shevchenko 2010: 78–79

the enormous size of the country, its resources, its history'.⁶⁷ The idea of Russia as a great power is something both elites in Moscow and the general population of Russia share. However, as Lo cautions, there is an important clarification to be made with regard to Russia's feeling and identity as a great power and its actual policy. According to Lo, Russia wants:

Acknowledgment of a *right of interest* in any issues it chooses, and of the principle of Russian indispensability. [...] In the end, the value of "indispensability" comes not from being expected to deliver results – indeed, this is an unwelcome burden – but from others accepting Russia's importance and greatness as incontestable truths.⁶⁸

The same seems to be true with regard to the place of Eurasia in Russian foreign policy. Russia considers Eurasia to be its almost exclusive region of privileged and special interests and it expects other states to respect this. As such, Russian domination of Eurasia is part and parcel of Moscow's foreign policy strategy establishing the country among the global great powers.

In addition to Russia's great power status, two other principles are particularly relevant in analysing Russian foreign policy: multipolarity and sovereignty. Russia's insistence on sovereignty as a foundational principle of global politics and its calls for the establishment of a multipolar global order are closely interlinked with the great power discourse. Multipolarity (or polycentrism, according to the Russian use of the term) is an important principle in Russian foreign policy and deeply embedded in official discourse as the following statement from the 2013 foreign policy concept makes abundantly clear: 'international relations are in the process of transition, the essence of which is the creation of a polycentric system of international relations'.⁶⁹ For Russia, polycentrism essentially signifies that a number of great powers, each dominating its respective geopolitical zone, manages the world's major problems and crises and thereby guarantees the maintenance of global order. For instance, as Lo argues, 'in the case of Russia, its enduring influence in post-Soviet Eurasia substantiates its claim to be a truly independent center of global power'.⁷⁰ The same

⁶⁷ Smith 2012: 40

⁶⁸ Lo 2015: 50

⁶⁹ Russian Federation 2013

⁷⁰ Lo 2015: 44

goes for other great powers, whose existence Moscow acknowledges. This illustrates that in Russia's use of the term, multipolarity is essentially a conservative notion of how to maintain the global order and more importantly Russia's position in that order. Ambrosio put forward an even narrower definition of Russia's defence of multipolarity as being inherently defensive in attempting to avoid US domination and unilateralism, thus guaranteeing Russia a rightful place in global politics.⁷¹ Hence, several observers noted that multipolarity is closely linked to Russia's perceived great powerness being highly instrumental in serving concrete foreign policy goals and legitimising Russia's position as a global great power.⁷²

In addition, the discourse on multipolarity should also be understood in Russia's attempt to counter US hegemony and the Western liberal order which dominated international relations in the post-Cold War period. As Chebankova argues, the notion of civilisation is an important element in Russian conceptions of multipolarity in that 'large cultural and political spaces would form the core of international dialog, promote regional integration, and fend for the particularity of world cultures and political forms'.⁷³ Hence, the way in which multipolarity is promoted in Russian discourse can be seen as an 'appeal to civilisational diversity vis-à-vis American unipolarity, hegemony, democracy promotion, and regime change'.⁷⁴ As a result, multipolarity is not so much a noble goal, but a discursive tool to delegitimise the actions of others and legitimise its own actions. As Makarychev and Morozov argue, 'being to a large extent a reaction against Western "collective unilateralism," [the Russian doctrine of multipolarity] is more often used to legitimize unilateral policies that are designed as countermeasures to the alleged interventionism of the West'.⁷⁵ Hence, Russia's leadership argues that in a polycentric global order, there is a variety of political concepts, none of which is universal or dominant. Hence, beyond countering US unilateralism and advancing its own interests, 'Russian officials portray multipolarity as enabling a more efficient and just international system', contrary to

⁷¹ Ambrosio 2005

⁷² Newton 2010; Chebankova 2017

⁷³ Chebankova 2017: 230

⁷⁴ Silvius 2016: 5

⁷⁵ Makarychev and Morozov 2011: 354-355

the system under Western hegemony which imposed a particular ideological and political framework on other states.⁷⁶

Multipolarity is thus closely linked to the concept of sovereignty and the concomitant idea of non-interference in another country's domestic affairs, which is understood by the Kremlin as an indispensable rule guiding relations between states. According to Chebankova, there are two dimensions of the concept of multipolarity with regard to sovereignty, the theoretical and the practical. From a theoretical point of view, multipolarity would lead to states giving up some of their sovereignty for the benefit of belonging to a regional or political group. From a practical viewpoint, however, sovereignty is still viewed as the principal guarantee for safeguarding the country's security and national interests in an unstable international system.⁷⁷ Indeed, in practice and in discourse, the idea of sovereignty is an instrument in cementing and defending Russia's place in global politics. It is not only important in the external realm in which sovereignty for state actions is a key principle, but it is also linked to the domestic conception of 'sovereign democracy' which foresees a unique path of development for Russia (in contrast to the classical notion of democracy prevalent in the West).⁷⁸ The concept of sovereignty is thus closely linked to the idea of Russia as great power. Being one of the global great powers, Russia not only occupies a dominant position in Eurasia (its sphere of influence) but also enjoys the right to conduct sovereign actions intended to advance its national interests. As Deyermond argues, the Russian discourse on sovereignty serves:

To enhance Russian security; to challenge, at both conceptual and practical levels, US primacy and the extension of influence in the post-Soviet region by the US and its "Western" allies; and to enhance Russia's position as both a regional power and a significant power in an emergent multipolar order.⁷⁹

The instrumental nature of this discourse becomes even clearer when examining Russia's use of the concept of sovereignty in the post-Soviet space. While in general, the Russian leadership promotes the sovereign right of states as an undisputable

⁷⁶ Silvius 2016: 7

⁷⁷ Chebankova 2017: 222-225

⁷⁸ Ziegler 2012

⁷⁹ Deyermond 2016: 958

principle of international relations, Deyermond argues that inside the post-Soviet space, Russia's use of the concept is fundamentally different. As such, in the post-Soviet space 'state sovereignty is regarded as porous in relation to Russia while remaining impermeable in relation to states outside the region'.⁸⁰ This essentially means that Russia acts as a hegemon in this region (which is considered to be its "pole") while expecting other states to respect this order, which in turn is based on the idea of a multipolar world in which a selected number of great powers determine global rules.

All these aspects are important in discussing Russian discourse and policy on Eurasia since the concept of Eurasia is at the very centre of this worldview. Hence, Eurasia is Russia's pole in which it acts as the enforcer and guarantor of sovereignty and which provides it with the necessary status to be considered and to act as a great power in global politics. Furthermore, the push for economic integration in Eurasia, culminating with the establishment of the EAEU, demonstrates Russia's willingness to shape regional order. Putting the emphasis on the cooperative nature of this new regional union, which is described like a large-scale integration project, also helps position Russia as an important partner, not only for the West but also for the East. Russia would thus become a non-negligible actor in Eurasia by developing new economic and trade ties between Europe and Asia, while remaining at the very centre of these developments.

3.2 Turkish foreign policy in the post-Cold War era

3.2.1 The structural determinants of Turkish foreign policy

Before describing the evolution of and main developments of Turkish foreign policy in the 1990s and the 2000s,⁸¹ the next paragraphs will briefly outline the foundational principles or what Aydin called the 'structural determinants' of Turkish foreign policy.⁸² Four aspects, which all had and still have a lasting impact on Turkish foreign

⁸⁰ Deyermond 2016: 982

⁸¹ For a longer-term historical perspective of Turkish foreign policy, including the late Ottoman Empire, see Hale 2000.

⁸² Aydin 1999

policies, will be described: the Ottoman legacy, Atatürk's ideology, the geopolitical realities and the duality of Turkish politics.

The birth of the Turkish republic amid the crumbling of the Ottoman Empire was accompanied with pressure from outside powers and Turkey's struggle to maintain an independent Turkish state. The victorious powers of the first World War broke up the Ottoman Empire, leaving Turkey with a small rump state at the heart of Anatolia. Only the subsequent war for independence, which lasted from 1919 to 1923, reversed this course, leading to a new treaty and the establishment of the Turkish republic in its modern form. Hence, right from the start, Turkey had to fight for its right of existence as a nation against external powers, causing a national trauma which left important imprints 'upon both subsequent Turkish attitudes vis-à-vis foreign powers and on their nation-building efforts'.⁸³

Two further aspects of the Ottoman legacy on Turkish foreign policy need to be mentioned: the country's westward orientation and more recent claims of being or becoming a regional power. As Aydin argues, 'throughout their history, the Turks have been connected to the West, first as a conquering superior and enemy, then as a component part, later as an admirer and unsuccessful imitator, and in the end as a follower and ally'.⁸⁴ This alignment with the West also had to do with a Turkish sense of superiority and a negative view about the 'backward' Middle East, which was derived from the century long domination of this region by the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁵ The consequence of this viewpoint was that for a long time, Turkey had almost no relations with and involvement in the Middle East, a situation which only really changed after the AKP came to power in the early 2000s.

However, in contrast to this viewpoint, the Ottoman legacy also conferred upon Turkey a belief in the country's strength and its important position in global politics.⁸⁶ This also included relations with the Middle East which increasingly came to be seen as a region in which Turkey could play a leading role, not least because of its past as an imperial power. In accordance with its growing power and material capabilities in the

⁸³ Aydin 1999: 158

⁸⁴ Aydin 1999: 160

⁸⁵ Aydin 1999: 163-164; Zarakol 2012: 742

⁸⁶ Walker 2009

mid-2000s due to its growing economy, Walker argued that ‘Turkey now has the opportunity to reassert itself in a way unprecedented by modern Turkish Republican standards, but quite normal by Ottoman standards’.⁸⁷ While it took Turkey quite some time to come to terms with its Ottoman legacy, it seems that it finally found a way to derive something positive from it. As a result, Turkey increasingly positioned itself as a leading regional and thus global actor.

In the early years of the Turkish republic, the country’s political destiny was dominated by its founding father and first president, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. His rule was characterised by a highly personal approach and he remained in power for fifteen years until his death. As a result, his vision for Turkey and the ideology he espoused were to have lasting imprints on Turkish domestic and foreign policy.⁸⁸ The basic tenets of Atatürk’s ideology (Kemalism) consisted of making Turkey a modern country and integrating it into the international system. According to Aslan, the principal aims of Kemalists were the ‘production of a secular-nationalist nation’, the creation of ‘a regional order based on the Westphalian polity’ and the ‘integration of the Turkish state into the modern (Western) world’.⁸⁹ This last point illustrates the fundamental principle of Turkish foreign policy, which has only recently lost some of its importance, namely its Western orientation. This was a consequence of Atatürk’s belief that Turkey should be modelled after the modern states of Western Europe and should reject its Eastern heritage.⁹⁰ The concomitant foreign policy implications were Turkey’s alliance with the West through NATO and, ultimately, its quest for EU membership as well as a negligent attitude towards the Middle East.⁹¹

These considerations have dominated Turkish foreign policy for over seventy years. Only the far-reaching geopolitical changes after the end of the Cold War and Turkey’s new environment led to a rethinking in Turkish foreign policy. While Europe and the West still remain the principal vector of Turkish foreign policy, both the Middle East and the countries of the former Soviet Union have gained importance in Turkey’s strategic calculus. However, it can be argued that Kemalist ideas are still very much

⁸⁷ Walker 2009: 503

⁸⁸ Aydın 1999: 170

⁸⁹ Aslan 2013: 41

⁹⁰ Aydın 1999: 176

⁹¹ Bozdağlioğlu 2008: 62

present since Turkey's foreign policy approach is based on ideas emanating from its founding father, not the least of which is Turkish attempts to play the role of mediator and stabiliser in its neighbourhood.

Turkey has a unique location at the intersection of different geographical regions and cultures. According to Aydin, this situation has allowed Turkey 'to play a role in world politics far greater than its size, population, and economic strength would indicate'.⁹² It is clear that such a geographical and geostrategic location has an influence on foreign policy. Hence, Robins has called Turkey a 'double gravity state' because throughout its existence there have been constraints and opportunities coming from different geographical directions.⁹³ A more recent characterisation has referred to Turkey as a 'cusp state', simultaneously belonging to various regions at the same time, while also negotiating different identity conceptions, both in domestic and foreign policy, related to these belongings.⁹⁴

Turkey's stance during the Cold War exemplifies the impact of its geography on its foreign policy. Sitting on the front line of the East-West confrontation, while being surrounded in the East by the Soviet Union, not only a world superpower but also a century-long rival, Turkey sought security in NATO membership which it acquired in 1952. After the end of the Cold War, Turkey found itself bordering newly independent states in highly unstable regions. While the Soviet threat was gone, fears remained as to potential outbreaks of conflicts in its neighbourhood. Therefore, security considerations are traditionally at the forefront of Turkish foreign policy thinking.⁹⁵ More recently, however, Turkey's geographical situation came to be perceived as an advantage rather than a liability. With growing confidence in its own power and a more active foreign policy under AKP rule, Turkey started to capitalise on its geography by orienting its foreign policy towards all the neighbouring regions while seizing economic and political opportunities and striving for greater influence in its neighbourhood.

⁹² Aydin 1999: 165

⁹³ Robins 2006; 2013

⁹⁴ Altunışık 2014

⁹⁵ Aydin 1999: 180

In addition to these structural determinants of Turkish foreign policy, a fourth aspect can be added, namely the underlying duality in Turkish history, geography and policy. As such, Turkey's trajectory was not linear because its policy options were consistently influenced by competing forces and factors. Among the most important forces, according to Robins, were the following dualities. The 'duality of bipolarity' which strongly influenced Turkey's attitude and foreign policy during the Cold War, the 'duality of a global, strategic versus a regional policy divide' which reflects Turkey's attempt at being a regional leader while increasingly also arguing for a greater role in global politics, the 'enduring duality of Turkey's normative geography' meaning the geopolitical realities as outlined above, and finally, the 'internalized duality' between the traditional Kemalist establishment and the newly formed political elite under AKP leadership.⁹⁶

Arguably, Turkey is not the only country that experiences various and diverging pulls on its strategic thinking and foreign policy orientation. Nevertheless, all these forces and dualities are linked to each other and provoke consistent debates about the country's politics, its orientation and the principles of Turkish foreign policy. In what follows, I will briefly describe the main developments and issues of Turkish foreign policy in the post-Cold War era, focusing on the period starting in 2002 when the AKP under Erdoğan's leadership came to power, which had a lasting impact on Turkish politics and foreign policy.

3.2.2 Turkish foreign policy, 1991-2002

During the Cold War, Turkey's external policies were characterised by a strong alliance with the West (NATO membership) and a status quo approach to foreign policy. However, the changed circumstances and unravelling events of the early 1990s represented a serious challenge for Turkey, forcing it to rethink its foreign policy. Robins distinguished three subsequent phases in the evolution of Turkey's foreign policy during and after these far-reaching changes, the first of which, from 1986 to 1991, was characterised by the 'overriding personal approach' of Prime Minister Turgut Özal, who aimed at establishing Turkey as a major and influential player in the

⁹⁶ Robins 2006: 204

post-Cold War world.⁹⁷ Similarly, Aras and Gorener argue, that Turgut Özal was the driving force behind a new approach in Turkish foreign policy which put more emphasis on multi-dimensional relations with various actors and regions.⁹⁸ However, Özal also put in place a foreign policy decision-making process which was essentially tailored upon himself, neglecting cooperation with the bureaucracy.⁹⁹ In contrast to this approach, in the second phase, from 1991 to 1994, Turkey consolidated its foreign policy and its position in global affairs and elaborated some clear foreign policy guidelines under the leadership of Prime Minister Demirel.¹⁰⁰ The third phase then, from 1994 to 1999, was characterised by the quick succession of several foreign ministers and the lack of real political leadership, which Robins called a ‘weak, fragmented, competitive approach’.¹⁰¹ During this time, Turkey experienced political instability also domestically with a succession of a number of prime ministers from different parties and a ‘soft coup’ by the military in 1997 dismantling the first Islamist government under Prime Minister Erbakan.

Overall, it can be argued that the 1990s were a very critical phase because it ultimately led to the revitalization of Turkish foreign policy.¹⁰² This decade, symbolised by Turgut Özal’s foreign policy opening, Turkey’s engagement with the European Union and the latter’s decision to accord Turkey candidate status in 1999, as well as Turkey’s continuing support for multilateral organisations such as the United Nations (UN) and NATO, laid the basis for Turkey’s future foreign policy.¹⁰³ Furthermore, the emergence of newly independent states in Turkey’s neighbourhood, especially the Turkic republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus, offered new opportunities, thus provoking a rethink of Turkish foreign policy. According to Kösebalaban, several actors with diverging understandings of Turkey’s identity and civilisational belonging contributed to a diversification of Turkish foreign policy:

Özal’s quest for leadership in the newly emerging vast Ottoman-Turkish cultural geography, the military’s pursuit of security alliance with Israel, Erbakan’s quest for leadership in the Islamic

⁹⁷ Robins 2003: 53-61

⁹⁸ Aras and Gorener 2010: 80

⁹⁹ Robins 2003: 60

¹⁰⁰ Robins 2003: 61-64

¹⁰¹ Robins 2003: 64-68. See also Hale 2000: 138-141.

¹⁰² Öcal 2005: 384

¹⁰³ Kirişci 2006: 29

world, and finally Ismail Cem's attempts to cash in Turkey's Muslim identity so as to convince Europe of its strategic importance.¹⁰⁴

Yet, Turkey's identity evolved during this period not just due to these changes. As Tür and Han argue, it was not only the rediscovery of its new neighbours that shifted Turkey's orientation, but also a new perception of the EU's and the West's attitude towards Turkey. Having witnessed the open way in which the countries of the former Eastern bloc were welcomed by European countries, while at the same time feeling a strong sense of rejection (as exemplified by the European Commission's deferral of Turkey's accession bid in 1989), Turkey started distancing itself from its hitherto traditional Eurocentric stance in order to 'search for a new, more self-reliant identity', an endeavour which was ongoing throughout the 1990s.¹⁰⁵

3.2.3 2002: the AKP and Erdoğan come to power

The general elections in 2002 resulted in a victory for the newly formed Justice and Development Party (AKP) thus marking the beginning of Erdoğan's rule. The AKP was formed by a group of politicians that split from the religious Welfare Party (against whose government the military launched the 'soft coup' in 1997), claiming to be a political and not religious party. As such, it initially subscribed to the traditional vectors of Turkish foreign policy.¹⁰⁶ As a result, the AKP has been called a 'post-Islamist' movement because of its Islamist roots, yet decisive rejection of their influence, on its policies (at least during the early years of the party's existence).¹⁰⁷ In its first years in power, the AKP government clearly oriented its foreign policy towards the West and Europe and its principal objective was working towards EU membership.¹⁰⁸ The adoption of this policy was motivated by various considerations. Not only did it underline Turkey's long-standing alliance with the West and its willingness to play a greater role in Europe, it can also be seen as a defence mechanism against the Kemalist opposition at home because adopting standards and regulations required by the EU would help the AKP implement reforms and curtail the overarching power of the secularist military establishment.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Kösebalaban 2011: 191

¹⁰⁵ Tür and Han 2011: 12

¹⁰⁶ Duran 2006: 289; Bilgin 2008: 417

¹⁰⁷ Dagi 2005: 21; Robins 2007: 291; Jung 2012

¹⁰⁸ Duran 2006: 290-293

¹⁰⁹ Dagi 2005: 32

In general, Turkish foreign policy under the AKP government can be divided into two phases. The first phase, corresponding with the first term in office of Prime Minister Erdoğan from 2002 to 2007, was characterised by the above described pro-European orientation. Following a major electoral win in 2007, the AKP government grew more assertive, leading to a reformulation of Turkish foreign policy. Henceforth, while Turkey still aimed for EU membership, it considerably enlarged its foreign policy vision, striving for greater influence in other regions, particularly in the Middle East. Similarly, as Öniş and Yilmaz argue, Turkey's relations with the EU evolved and two distinct phases can be identified. The first period, starting with the AKP's accession to power until the end of 2005, can be called the 'golden age of Europeanization in Turkey'.¹¹⁰ During this period, Turkey pushed for full membership in the EU and undertook numerous efforts, such as economic and judicial reforms, in order to comply with EU demands. After finally opening accession negotiations with the EU in 2005, the wind started to turn. As a result, the second phase of Turkey-EU relations 'deviated from an all-out Europeanization drive to a possible retreat to what could be described as a kind of "loose Europeanization" or "soft Euro-Asianism" strategy'.¹¹¹ The development came hand in hand with the realisation that Turkey should aim at playing a bigger role in global politics, notably by developing a stronger posture in its regional neighbourhood. This deflected some of the attention away from the EU towards other regions.

Indeed, over the last decade and especially under Erdoğan's leadership, Turkey's relations with the Middle East grew closer. Since the AKP's rise to power, its Islamist background has spurred debates about Turkey's policy towards the Middle East. Reference was made to a Turkish 'rediscovery' of the Middle East,¹¹² or even to a 'Middle Easternization' of Turkish foreign policy.¹¹³ As Stein argues, Ankara sought to reconnect with its neighbours in former Ottoman lands 'through a concept of Muslim unity' and thus expand its influence in the Middle East.¹¹⁴ In general, both a closer affinity with the Middle East among AKP politicians as well as the general shift

¹¹⁰ Öniş and Yilmaz 2009: 13

¹¹¹ Öniş and Yilmaz 2009: 13

¹¹² Larrabee 2007

¹¹³ Oğuzlu 2008

¹¹⁴ Stein 2014: 88

in perception of Turkey's regional role contributed to this development. As Dal argues, on the basis of Turkey's new-found geopolitical identity as a central country in the international system and consequently as a member of many regional subsystems, the Middle East became more important.¹¹⁵ The main reasons for Turkey's renewed interest in the Middle East were determined by both economic and civilisational concerns. Hence, the religious background of the AKP helped foster a new image of Turkey in the Middle East and 'led to an increase in the country's consciousness toward a potential regional leadership role based on a new civilizational rhetoric'.¹¹⁶ In addition, economic considerations played an important role. Since the AKP came to power, in an attempt to diversify its exports and find new markets for Turkish products, Turkey increased its trade activities with the Middle East, a dynamic which was strongly supported by the new businesses popping up in central Turkey (the so-called Anatolian tigers), which formed a core constituency of the AKP.¹¹⁷

In addition, Turkey's relations with the West and the accession process with the EU provided further impetus for Turkey's involvement in the Middle East. As such, 'strategic calculations and pragmatism aimed at increasing Turkey's bargaining power vis-à-vis the West, especially in its complex relations with the EU' played an important role in depicting Turkey as a crucial regional and global actor.¹¹⁸ In general, it can be argued that Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East did not replace Turkey's traditional westward orientation but rather it testifies to a more assertive approach under Erdoğan and to a general 'gradual diversification of Turkish foreign policy'.¹¹⁹ Turkey's involvement in what used to be part of the Ottoman Empire was thus part of the general foreign policy goal of establishing Turkey as an important actor in regional and global politics on the basis of the country's strategic geographical location and cultural diversity.

Erdoğan and the AKP government considered Turkey to occupy an important position in international politics and in consequence they promoted a more active Turkish foreign policy. Several factors explain this new approach in Turkish foreign policy,

¹¹⁵ Dal 2012: 254

¹¹⁶ Dal 2012: 250; Öniş 2011: 57

¹¹⁷ Altunışık and Martin 2011: 578-580

¹¹⁸ Dal 2012: 251

¹¹⁹ Larrabee 2007: 111

among them the influence of the former advisor and later Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, the re-formulation of Turkey's identity as well as the growing importance of economic factors and Turkey's role as a trading state. The new geopolitical discourse which emerged under the AKP was a consequence of both domestic and international changes, where global economic developments opened up a new zone of engagement for Turkey in its neighbourhood and the power struggle with the Kemalist and military establishment led to a reformulation of Turkey's identity towards a more conservative and Islamist stance.¹²⁰ One of the principal ruptures in the new foreign policy under the AKP was a shift towards a civilisational geopolitics approach, meaning that concepts such as culture and religion are predominant in defining the international system, which in the case of Turkey meant that its 'centrality in terms of representation of Islamic civilization is underlined'.¹²¹

In general, however, this new foreign policy does not represent a complete departure from traditional values but should rather be considered a subtle reorientation. For instance, as some scholars argue, the new AKP approach can also be seen as a continuation of efforts first made by Turgut Özal towards the end of the Cold War, who emphasised the country's geographical position and its historical weight in order to claim a greater role for Turkey.¹²² Similarly, Başer analyses the often-cited shift of axis argument in Turkish foreign policy under the AKP and comes to the conclusion that the national role conceptions most frequently used by AKP leaders were also used by predecessor governments. As Başer observes, there was, however, a change in terms of Turkey's level of activism in foreign policy, especially with reference to the roles of 'regional leader and global system collaborator', which were particularly prominent under the AKP government.¹²³ It should be noted though, that part of this activism might also be explained by the fact that Turkey was again operating in a stable and indeed growing economic environment domestically.

¹²⁰ Yeşiltaş 2013: 670-672

¹²¹ Yeşiltaş 2013: 676

¹²² Aras and Gorener 2010: 80

¹²³ Başer 2015

3.2.4 Reformulation of Turkish foreign policy (and the impact of Davutoğlu)

There has been a significant evolution in Turkish foreign policy under the AKP, especially following their decisive electoral victory in 2007. An important figure in this regard is Ahmet Davutoğlu who is the mastermind behind the new Turkish foreign policy approach.¹²⁴ A professor of international relations, Davutoğlu became advisor to Prime Minister Erdoğan before becoming minister of foreign affairs in 2009 and eventually prime minister in 2014, replacing Erdoğan after the latter moved on to become president. Davutoğlu had a clear vision for Turkish foreign policy, which he was then able to put into practice himself while his scholarly theses provided the blueprint for Turkish foreign policy. However, the evolution of Turkish foreign policy in the late 2000s cannot singlehandedly be explained by the figure of Davutoğlu, other factors such as external events in Turkey's neighbourhood and economic factors also play an important role.

The core idea of Davutoğlu's vision for Turkey is his 'strategic depth' doctrine which he outlined in a book titled *Strategic Depth*, published in 2001.¹²⁵ This concept makes allusion to Turkey's historical experience as part of the Ottoman Empire as well as its geographical situation at the intersection of different regions and civilisations.¹²⁶ This doctrine marks a departure from Turkey's traditional Kemalist approach to foreign policy. At the core of the strategic depth doctrine, are the two concepts of 'historical depth' and 'geographic depth'. First, historical depth is a characteristic of a country which, according to Davutoğlu, is 'at the epicentre of [historical] events' often implying that this country has once been part of an empire.¹²⁷ Coupled with this understanding of Turkey's past is an emphasis on cultural and civilisational aspects, which according to Davutoğlu, have a crucial influence on Turkish foreign policy. Thereby, on the basis of its Ottoman legacy and shared Islamic heritage, Turkey is ideally placed to develop strong links to its neighbouring states, even acting as a leader within this community.¹²⁸ Second, the concept of 'geographic depth' is a function of 'historical depth' and makes allusion to the past and present geographic spread of a

¹²⁴ Aras and Gorener 2010: 81; Larrabee 2010: 159; Öniş 2011: 53

¹²⁵ Davutoğlu (2001). Unfortunately, Davutoğlu's book, entitled 'Strategic depth: Turkey's international position', has not been translated into English to date.

¹²⁶ Walker 2007: 33

¹²⁷ Quoted in Murinson 2006: 951

¹²⁸ Arkan and Kınacıoğlu 2016: 391; see also Stein 2014: 7-8.

country and thus ‘places Turkey right at the centre of many geopolitical influences’.¹²⁹ For Davutoğlu, this reading of Turkey’s geography as geostrategically lying at the epicentre of many regions, conditions its foreign policy practice.

The consequence of Davutoğlu’s strategic depth doctrine for foreign policy is an understanding that Turkey should be conscious of its history and its geography and take these two factors as guiding lights in the definition of its foreign policy. Emanating from these reflections is one of the core concepts of Turkish foreign policy as envisaged by Davutoğlu, namely the central country concept, which stipulates that a central country ‘is geographically and geoculturally located at the intersection of self-contained regional systems’.¹³⁰ Indeed, in one of his articles, Davutoğlu argues that Turkey’s geography and history define it as a central country, the result of which being that Turkey should adopt an active foreign policy because a ‘central country with such an optimal geographic location cannot define itself in a defensive manner’.¹³¹ According to Yalvaç, the strategic depth doctrine as a geopolitical discourse ‘represents a secularized form of Islamic politics oriented towards increasing the power of Turkey in those regions with which it had close ties historically during the Ottoman Empire’.¹³² In sum, this illustrates the willingness of Turkey’s leadership to increase its position in regional and global politics and has major influence on events in its neighbourhood.

In addition to this rather geostrategic doctrine, Davutoğlu also outlined five practical principles guiding his vision for Turkish foreign policy.¹³³ First, in order to have influence abroad, a ‘balance between security and democracy’ at home was needed. Second, the importance of the regional environment for Turkey is taken into account in the ‘zero problems with neighbours’ policy. Third, and this is a consequence of the previous principle, the establishment of good relations with regions such as the Balkans, Middle East, Caucasus and Central Asia is a key priority. Fourth, Turkey should conduct a ‘multi-dimensional foreign policy’ in which its relations with different global actors are ‘complementary, not in competition’. The fifth and final

¹²⁹ Quoted in Murinson 2006: 952

¹³⁰ Kardaş 2012b: 3

¹³¹ Davutoğlu 2008: 78

¹³² Yalvaç 2012: 167

¹³³ Davutoğlu 2008

principle was the development and implementation of a ‘rhythmic diplomacy’ which means to have a particularly active diplomacy by hosting important international meetings and conducting frequent state visits.¹³⁴

In accordance with Davutoğlu’s viewpoints outlined above, the AKP government reformulated Turkey’s position in the international system. However, this is not purely a consequence of Davutoğlu’s influence, but also of the changed geography of the post-Cold War world. The erosion of the Soviet threat eased Turkey’s security needs and the necessity to align with the West. Simultaneously, it opened up new areas for security cooperation and economic opportunities, especially in Turkey’s neighbourhood. This led to a ‘de-securitisation’ of Turkish foreign policy, meaning that security considerations, traditionally the principal vector in Turkish foreign policy, became less important.¹³⁵ This also meant that, while politically, Turkey was interested in becoming a part of Europe through EU membership, in security terms it was less dependent on it. As a result, opportunities were opening up for Turkey to venture into new geographical regions. Indeed, as Yeşiltaş argues, instead of securitisation, flexibility became the new framework for Turkey’s approach to its geographical environment.¹³⁶ Turkey’s leadership realised that their country could be more than the eastern-most partner in a Western alliance. Under AKP rule, Turkey tried to emancipate itself from the traditional vectors of its foreign policy and the government aimed to reposition the country on the world map. The AKP leadership thus adopted national role conceptions, which according to Aras and Gorener, defined the country as a ‘regional leader’, ‘regional protector’ and ‘global system collaborator’.¹³⁷ In general, following the AKP’s rise to power, Turkey came out of its foreign policy isolation and, probably naturally so, targeted the states in its immediate regional environment.

Furthermore, economic considerations became more important. As Fisher Onar argues, there were four main discourses in the AKP government with regard to Turkey’s foreign policy orientation, the overarching of which being the ‘Turkey Inc.’ discourse. According to this discourse, the AKP aims at ‘establishing Turkey as a (soft)

¹³⁴ Davutoğlu 2008: 79-82, see also Hursoy 2011: 151-158

¹³⁵ Ülgen 2010: 8

¹³⁶ Yeşiltaş 2013: 682

¹³⁷ Aras and Gorener 2010: 81

power – a hub and gateway – for transactions across its multiple regions and hinterlands’.¹³⁸ In addition to the decrease of security considerations, the increase of economic opportunities and commercial links became major drivers behind the new Turkish foreign policy. Under the AKP the importance of trade and economic exchanges in foreign policy significantly increased. With reference to this development, Kirişci adopted the concept of ‘trading state’ to Turkey whereby he refers to the importance of economic factors and commercial opportunities in determining the orientation of Turkish foreign policy.¹³⁹ In addition to the general growth of Turkey’s economy and concomitant increase in trade relations, there are several reasons for this development. First, the ‘de-securitisation’ of Turkish foreign policy and Turkey’s relations with its neighbours has led to a shift in the policy-makers’ thinking away from security concerns to economic considerations.¹⁴⁰ Second, in accordance with general global tendencies and the shift from the West to the East in terms of economic activity, Ankara increasingly also turned towards other regions, such as the Middle East, in order to diversify its trade relations.¹⁴¹ The economic troubles of the EU and Eurozone, as well as a general dissatisfaction among Turkish businesses with European partners, further fostered this dynamic.¹⁴² Finally, Turkey’s leadership quickly realised that in order to be more influential in global and regional politics, Turkey needed to have the means to back such ambitions. Hence, the AKP government increasingly combined foreign policy with economic relations by promoting Turkish businesses on state trips and bringing along large delegations of business people.¹⁴³

Since the AKP came to power in 2002, Turkish foreign policy has moved away from some of its long-standing determinants. As Yeşiltaş puts it, the ‘AKP has a liberal-oriented geopolitical practice in shaping Turkey’s regional policy, but at the same time it has a conservative and Islamist geopolitical vision in terms of connecting history and culture to foreign policy’.¹⁴⁴ Turkey became a more active player in international affairs and a lot of it was due to the attitude and the vision of the AKP leadership.

¹³⁸ Fisher Onar 2011: 472

¹³⁹ Kirişci 2009

¹⁴⁰ Kirişci and Kaptanoğlu 2011: 716

¹⁴¹ Öniş 2011: 54-55

¹⁴² Kirişci and Kaptanoğlu 2011: 706

¹⁴³ Kirişci and Kaptanoğlu 2011: 715

¹⁴⁴ Yeşiltaş 2013: 682

Given its history and its geographical position, Turkey has manifold political and economic interests and seeks a position of influence in different regions. The AKP government capitalised on this situation and, while still striving for EU membership, diversified its foreign relations, especially with its immediate neighbourhood and the Middle East. As a result, Turkish foreign policy has become more pragmatic in that it is based on an evaluation of the country's interests and domestic needs.

3.3 Russia-Turkey relations since the end of the Cold War

The previous sections briefly discussed the major developments in and evolution of Russian and Turkish foreign policy since the end of the Cold War. The next section offers a brief description of Russia-Turkey relations and how they evolved from a complicated relationship in the 1990s to a strategic partnership in the 2000s. The bilateral relationship improved to such a point that some observers even raised the question whether the two countries would eventually form a 'Eurasian axis'.¹⁴⁵ Russia and Turkey indeed share a number of similarities with regard to their historical experience and geographical characteristics. Furthermore, as illustrated above, Russia's and Turkey's relationship with the West is complicated and fraught with misunderstandings which have important consequences for their foreign policy orientation as well as self-perception of their place in the world. This thesis focuses on these two countries and their respective government elites' discourse concerning the importance of Eurasia. The subsequent chapters discuss these two states' Eurasian discourse separately while the concluding chapters will offer a synthesis and only certain elements of a comparison. Nevertheless, it seems relevant to provide a very cursory overview of Russia-Turkey relations in order to understand the complexities in their bilateral relationship and what this means for their respective perception of and policies with regard to Eurasia.

Turkey and Russia share a history of competition, warfare and mistrust. The Russian and Ottoman Empires fought numerous wars with each other in the 18th and 19th centuries over territory and influence in their shared neighbourhood. During the Cold War, Turkey was an ally of the US and the West, becoming a member of NATO in

¹⁴⁵ Hill and Taşpınar 2006; Erşen 2011b

1952, largely due to the perceived Soviet threat to Turkey's security.¹⁴⁶ Following the end of the Cold War, Ankara and Moscow had to rethink their relationship to try to put it on a new, constructive basis. At the same time, the emergence of newly independent states in Turkey's neighbourhood considerably changed the circumstances, especially since some of the states in the Caucasus and Central Asia had historical, cultural, religious and linguistic links to Turkey. Relations between Turkey and Russia since the end of the Cold War can be roughly divided into two periods. The first period, from the end of the Cold War until 2002, when the AKP came to power in Turkey, was characterised by a hesitant approach between the two countries. On the other hand, the second period, starting in 2002, has led to a stable relationship, which overall can be characterised as cooperative based on strong trade and energy ties between the two countries, despite occasional disagreements.¹⁴⁷

Turkey-Russia relations in the early 1990s began on a negative footing. As a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, a new space for Turkish foreign policy opened up in Central Asia and the Caucasus and Ankara tried to gain advantage from this position. As a result, the '1990s can be classified as the "lost years" in Turkey-Russia relations' due to their continuing rivalry and competition.¹⁴⁸ Still, the last decade of the twentieth century certainly led to a normalisation in relations between Ankara and Moscow. This and the fact that both countries came to realise that they share a number of converging interests, mainly related to the instability in their common neighbourhood, led to increased cooperation.¹⁴⁹ Overall, the nature of the relationship between the two countries in the 1990s can be characterised as 'routine "normalization"', but not (yet) leading to 'genuine rapprochement'.¹⁵⁰

In the 2000s then, following Erdoğan's rise to power in Turkey, relations with Russia started to improve.¹⁵¹ For instance, Vladimir Putin's visit to Turkey in 2004 was the first time after the end of the Cold War that a Russian president would visit the Turkish

¹⁴⁶ Aktürk 2014: 13

¹⁴⁷ For example, the shooting down by the Turkish air force of a Russian fighter jet over Syria in November 2015 led to a month-long low in the bilateral relationship, however, without fundamentally damaging cooperation between the two countries (see Erşen 2017b).

¹⁴⁸ Özbay 2011: 70

¹⁴⁹ Aktürk 2006: 339

¹⁵⁰ Sezer 2000: 63

¹⁵¹ Erşen 2011a, 2011b; Özbay 2011

republic. Thereafter, a series of bilateral visits and meetings between Putin and Erdoğan were organised and the two leaders openly and frequently expressed their willingness for stronger cooperation and friendship between the two countries. As some argue, despite differences on a number of foreign policy issues, the personal relationship between Putin and Erdoğan considerably helped reduce the complexities of the bilateral relationship and drove cooperation forward.¹⁵² Another reason for the improvement was also Turkey's 'zero problems with neighbours' policy, which also included Russia and with which Turkey aimed to foster positive relations with Russia, also by acknowledging Russia's importance for stability in Eurasia.¹⁵³ In general, the positive attitude of both countries in seeking opportunities for cooperation and mutually beneficial policies led to the 'maturation' of Turkish-Russian relations.¹⁵⁴ This is exemplified by the establishment of the High-level Cooperation Council in 2010, which institutionalised an annual meeting between the two countries' leaders with the aim to further promote cooperation on a wide variety of issues. It can thus be argued that the 2000s were a decisive 'turning point' in Russia-Turkey relations.¹⁵⁵

While at first strategic considerations and stability in the region stood at the forefront, economic considerations and trade relations, above all in the tourism and energy sectors, eventually became the most important issues. Indeed, the bilateral trade turnover multiplied from a total of about \$4 billion in 2000 to over \$30 billion in 2013, thus making Russia Turkey's biggest trading partner besides the EU. As Erşen argues, the warming of relations between Russia and Turkey was thus principally fuelled by 'pragmatic economic interests of two "trading states", rather than well-formulated long-term strategies'.¹⁵⁶ While commercial relations and tourism between the two countries have soared, the most important factor in Turkish-Russian relations is energy.¹⁵⁷ This is emphasised by a look at the trade data: 65 percent of Turkish imports from Russia are either natural gas or oil products.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, a direct gas pipeline runs from Russia to Turkey under the Black Sea and initial construction work has started on an additional pipeline, termed the Turkish Stream project. Since Russia is a

¹⁵² Taşpınar 2014

¹⁵³ Aras and Fidan 2009: 210

¹⁵⁴ Özbay 2011: 70

¹⁵⁵ Erşen 2011a: 109

¹⁵⁶ Erşen 2011a: 110

¹⁵⁷ Kardaş 2012a; Bourgeot 2013

¹⁵⁸ Ulchenko 2013: 5

net energy exporter and Turkey a net energy importer, it is not surprising that energy occupies such an important place in their commercial relationship since the two countries perfectly complement each other.

The improvement of relations between Turkey and Russia in the 2000s led some observers to reflect on the nature of this relationship and discuss the potential for the formation of a Russia-Turkey axis.¹⁵⁹ Such statements should be read in the context of Russia's and Turkey's respective relations with the West and Europe. According to some, 'alienation' from the West and Europe was a driving force behind the Ankara-Moscow rapprochement.¹⁶⁰ According to this logic, Turkey and Russia moved closer because they were both excluded from Europe. Both countries consider themselves to be part of Europe, both geographically and culturally, and they resent the European Union for assuming a sort of monopoly in defining Europe's identity, thus making them 'outsiders'.¹⁶¹ Secondly, Russia and Turkey perceive themselves as regional powers with some leverage and influence over the states in their neighbourhood but both countries lament that neither the EU nor the US respect this sense of regional leadership.¹⁶² Furthermore, the US role and interventionism in their neighbourhoods, such as the invasion of Iraq, was another common point of agreement.¹⁶³ In general, according to Aktürk, 'Turkey and Russia, remaining on "Europe's fringes", both had a very ambivalent and often adversarial relationship with Europe, serving as the constitutive "Other" of European identity'.¹⁶⁴

Despite these commonalities and a strongly increased commercial basis for their relationship, Russia-Turkey relations remain contested. On the basis of shared interests, Ankara and Moscow built a pragmatic relationship with reciprocal benefits. However, their relationship never moved towards forging a closer alliance or axis as some in the West feared. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, Russia-Turkey relations remain caught in equal measures between cooperation and competition.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁹ Hill and Taşpınar 2006; Erşen 2011b

¹⁶⁰ Kınıklioğlu and Morkva 2007: 548

¹⁶¹ Sakwa 2010

¹⁶² Hill and Taşpınar 2006: 85-90

¹⁶³ Erşen 2011a: 95-96

¹⁶⁴ Aktürk 2014: 17

¹⁶⁵ Svarin 2015

3.4 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to provide a concise summary and overview of Russian and Turkish foreign policy in the 1990s and 2000s while touching upon the most important developments as well as some underlying features and principles of this policy. The emphasis lay primarily on the more recent period, in the case of Russia starting with Putin's election as president in 2000, and in the case of Turkey starting in 2002 with the AKP's first electoral win.

In sum, the Russia part of the chapter argued that after a brief phase of Westernisation, the principal goal of Putin was to restore Russia's place in the international system as an important and respected actor, or put differently, a great power. This not only meant expanding Russia's influence in the post-Soviet space but increasingly also countering what was seen as the West's and NATO's expansion, as well as US unilateral actions globally. Following his return to the presidency in 2012, Putin quickly started implementing his plans for the establishment of a Eurasian (Economic) Union, providing an institutional framework for integration in the post-Soviet space, and thus helping cement Russia's role as regional hegemon. Furthermore, relations with the West further plummeted due to the Ukraine crisis starting at the end of 2013, and attempts at diversifying Russia's foreign policy options, including a supposed turn to the Asian vector, became central elements of Russian foreign policy.

Turkish foreign policy under the new AKP government offered a new vision and role for the country as a regional power, on the basis of being the leader of its civilisational basin, while simultaneously striving for more influence at the global level. Accession to the European Union remained a major goal in the early years and a diversification of Turkish foreign policy, including a turn to the Middle East, followed in the later years around 2007-2009. The chapter also focused on the reformulation of Turkish foreign policy under Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, whose strategic depth theory focused on Turkey's historical and geographical characteristics as a determinant of Turkey's position as a central country in global affairs.

As has become clear from the above discussion, both Russia and Turkey see themselves as important countries not only in regional but also global politics. Owing

to their geographical location as well as historical experience as centres of regional and global empires, Russia and Turkey strive to maintain their status as powerful and central countries. In the case of Russia, its status as a global great power with interests everywhere and its role as a balancing force in the multipolar international system are key to understanding the country's geopolitical imagination. Turkey's position as a central country, both geographically between different regions, but also on a civilisational basis as the leader of its civilisation, is a crucial element in guiding the country's foreign policy. As we will see in subsequent chapters, the concept of Eurasia plays a role in all these considerations. Before moving to a detailed discussion about the place of Eurasia in Russian and Turkish government discourse, the next chapter will offer an overview of the various conceptions of Eurasia, the philosophy of Eurasianism and a more philosophical discussion (as opposed to the geopolitical analysis in subsequent chapters) on the contemporary use of Eurasia in Russia and Turkey.

Chapter 4: The concept of Eurasia

This chapter offers a discussion about the concept of Eurasia in general as well as in the Russian and Turkish contexts. This chapter does not consider Russian and Turkish official discourses on Eurasia, which are discussed in later chapters. The following sections will illustrate the heterogeneity of the concept of Eurasia and its different meanings across disciplines and regions. In short, I will attempt to demonstrate and outline several points. In discussing Eurasia, and its relevance for Russia and Turkey, geography takes centre stage. However, geography is never considered in a vacuum and is always complemented with other elements such as history, culture, or linguistics. In Russia, Eurasian ideas are grounded in the philosophical tradition of Eurasianism, an ideology promoting the vision of Russia as a Eurasian empire. Yet, as will be argued below, Eurasia is not just a philosophical or ideological construction, but also a pragmatic political and economic concept. Russia developed and implemented, jointly with some of its neighbouring states, an integration project in Eurasia, the Eurasian Economic Union. Turkey's understanding of Eurasia is principally based on pragmatic interests and economic opportunities arising from its Eurasian geography.

Generally speaking, one of the key characteristics of Eurasia is its analytical flexibility. As a result, Eurasia is generally understood in many different ways depending on the country, historical context but also on one's political identity. In sum, this chapter argues that for a variety of reasons, Eurasia is a central concept for the study of Russia. Also in the case of Turkey, Eurasia has entered the political realm following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, albeit less prominently than in the case of Russia. Still, Eurasia as a geopolitical concept is evoked in many different ways by diverse constituencies in both countries. Exploring these ways is the goal of this chapter.

The chapter is structured as follows. In the first part, the chapter will look broadly at Eurasia as a geopolitical concept that re-emerged after the end of the Cold War, attracting substantial academic interest. Thereafter, I will focus on the readings of Eurasia in Russia starting with the ideas of classical Eurasianism, its post-Soviet variation of Neo-Eurasianism and more pragmatic ideas in contemporary Russia, after which I describe more recent political efforts at integrating the Eurasian region. The

final section will look at Turkey, its discovery of Eurasia following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and provides an overview of the different versions of Eurasianism.

4.1 Eurasia as a geopolitical concept after the Cold War

There are generally a large number of different characterisations and definitions of Eurasia. This region, covering a large continuous landmass, was an arena for great power rivalry, imperial domination and, more recently, instability. While theoretically, Eurasia could be defined simply in geographical terms as the combination of the European and Asian continents, in practice the term cannot be removed entirely from its historical (Eurasianism) and contemporary political connotations (Eurasian Economic Union).¹ After the break-up of the Soviet Union, Eurasia emerged as a new geographical and geopolitical entity. Especially with reference to traditional geopolitical theories and imperial geopolitics, various scholars described the region of Eurasia as opening up and re-emerging onto the global scene.² In these accounts, the Eurasian landmass regains importance as the ‘heartland’, a concept coined by the British geographer Mackinder in the early 20th century, which refers to the division of the world map into different territorial swathes, control of which was needed in a world of imperial competition for regional and ultimately global influence.³ Russia and Turkey both occupy a particularly central geographical location in this heartland.

Eurasia’s historical experience is dominated by imperialism under various forms and shapes. Hence, Kotkin proposes a different nomination for the space of Eurasia, namely ‘*ab imperio*’, literally meaning ‘from empire’, to characterise the centrality of the imperial legacy of contemporary Eurasia.⁴ Among the different empires that controlled Eurasia, Kotkin singles out the Mongol empire because it primarily focused on exchanges, and less on cultural dominance, throughout the territory under its control. It was these exchanges that helped form a somewhat coherent entity in Eurasia and especially provided a framework for analysis today which is not focused on nationalities or cultures, but on exchanges and more broadly on governance or the lack

¹ Hutchings 2016: xiii-xiv

² Brzezinski 1997; see also Sengupta 2009

³ Mackinder 1904.

⁴ Kotkin 2007

thereof.⁵ For Kotkin, Eurasia is an arena that cannot be studied and analysed under the guise of specific geographic, linguistic or cultural characteristics. For instance, he argues that Eurasianism is not a helpful analytical category because it is historically grounded and associated with nationalism and thus a phenomenon related to a specific period and politics. Essentially, Kotkin advocates the use of a pragmatic and flexible definition of Eurasia, 'that seeks to acknowledge interregional or cross-regional phenomena that arose via the formative frame of empire'.⁶ Indeed, the analytical substance of Eurasia seems to lie in the variety of regional stakes and actors with an interest in them. Tsygankov singles out the importance of political, economic and cultural factors. Hence, politically Eurasia was controlled and dominated by various political entities lacking clear geographical boundaries most of the time. Economically, the vast resources of the region and the transportation links connected to them fostered important connections between continents. And, culturally, Eurasia was a melting pot of different cultures and influences in an open nature.⁷ In sum, 'politically, economically and culturally, the region has functioned as a unity in diversity, serving as a hub of various influences'.⁸

While there are a number of caveats to the use of the geopolitical concept of Eurasia as an analytical concept, it is nonetheless helpful when studying the region. As the above discussion demonstrated, a multitude of definitions and changing meanings of Eurasia exist in various contexts. There is no single Eurasia, because geographically there is no unanimity as to its definition, politically there is no single country dominating it and historically there is no single point of reference allowing for a clear definition of Eurasia. However, the absence of a single definition and the multitude of meanings attached to Eurasia can also be considered an advantage. Gabowitsch, for instance, argues that it would even be dangerous to ignore the multitude of 'Eurasias' and 'Eurasianisms' because we would blind ourselves to the diverging interpretations of what Eurasia means for the variety of actors in the region using it.⁹ As such, and as

⁵ Kotkin 2007: 508-510

⁶ Kotkin 2007: 508

⁷ Tsygankov 2012: 2

⁸ Tsygankov 2012: 2

⁹ Gabowitsch 2009: 25

Dressler and Richard rightly point out, Eurasia is above all an analytical concept and functions as a ‘place and object of discourse’.¹⁰

When looking at the different interpretations of Eurasia’s principal characteristics, it seems that observers prefer to refer to Eurasia without clear geographical references. Dressler and Richard conclude that the principal characteristic of Eurasia, and therefore the inability to define its borders clearly, is it being primarily a place of passage or a transit zone.¹¹ This definition refers to both Eurasia’s historical experience and its geographical spread. A large number of peoples, political entities, powers and countries inhabited this space, which inevitably also led to a lot of trade and commercial exchanges. Similarly, and due to these factors, Eurasia was also always a contested zone in which different interests and powers clashed. This was especially true following the break-up of the Soviet Union, when all the actors in the region and particularly Russia, had to adapt to the new circumstances.

In sum, when speaking of Eurasia, we are looking at a vast geographical space that experienced a great number of different political systems and ideologies, provided the foundation for numerous commercial activities and was the scene for cultural interactions. As a result, contemporary Eurasia carries a rather large and significant heritage and eschews a homogeneous characterisation. In this sense, Von Hagen proposes to use Eurasia as an ‘anti-paradigm’ which allows for a fresh look at the region devoid of the constraints of previous analyses. As a result, Eurasia is stripped from the attachment to a single historical reference point, such as the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union, and opens up new spatial and temporal boundaries for analysis.¹² While Von Hagen’s argument refers to historical scholarship, the following argument is also true for other disciplines, namely that the idea of the Eurasian anti-paradigm is ‘to indicate an opening up of the horizon of historical scholarship to new framings, topics, and dynamics and to “return” the Eurasian space to world history after nearly a century of Cold War isolation’.¹³

¹⁰ Dressler and Richard 2009: 385-386

¹¹ Dressler and Richard 2009: 398

¹² Von Hagen 2004: 448, 459

¹³ Von Hagen 2004: 468

This brief discussion illustrated that Eurasia has a number of different meanings and, as Trenin observes, has become an ‘increasingly interconnected economic, political and strategic concept’.¹⁴ In general, it seems that the keywords with regard to the definition of contemporary Eurasia are ‘connection’ and ‘instability’, highlighting both historical and current tendencies. We should thus agree that there can be no one Eurasia, only many, and that this is precisely the analytical value in studying this large region. This characterisation is useful for the purposes of this study because it does not see Eurasia through the lens of a single narrow analytical paradigm but encourages a diversity of explorations on what Eurasia is and what it means for a variety of actors. For instance, Russia’s and Turkey’s discourse on Eurasia differ on many points but both are valuable in studying Russian and Turkish foreign policy and in analysing the role of these countries in international affairs.

4.1.1 Eurasia in academia and policy circles

Despite its frequent use in academic and policy circles, Eurasia remains a vague concept and as Von Hagen reminds us, Eurasia’s boundaries ‘remain ill-defined and dynamic’.¹⁵ For instance, as Stephen Kotkin notes, a large number of university centres and research institutes as well as academic journals carry the term Eurasia in their name. However, their understanding of Eurasia varies strongly. Whereas some institutions chose the designation Eurasia to replace the Soviet Union or post-Soviet space, others deliberately left the definition of the space of Eurasia open.¹⁶

This lack of clarity within academia reflects the above discussion about the multitude of definitions of the concept of Eurasia.¹⁷ Kotkin, for instance, comes to the conclusion that ‘there is no underlying or overall coherence to Eurasia. Eurasia is not a system; it is an arena’.¹⁸ Similarly, after leading a collective research project examining the idea of Eurasia, Smith and Richardson conclude that ‘any singular notion of Eurasia is shattered, and instead it emerges as ephemeral, shifting, and somehow always beyond our grasp. Instead we find a Eurasia of myriad forms, shaped by ideologies and

¹⁴ Trenin 2013

¹⁵ Von Hagen 2004: 446

¹⁶ Kotkin 2007: 487-490

¹⁷ Thus, there has been a range of literature in the West analysing the meaning and definition of the concept of Eurasia from different perspectives and angles. See for example Kaiser 2004; Von Hagen 2004; Kotkin 2007; Dressler 2009; Gleason 2010.

¹⁸ Kotkin 2007: 508

identities, defined by inconsistencies and incoherence'.¹⁹ We start thus from the assumption that the concept of Eurasia is a fluid one and cannot be defined conclusively. In any case, as Djalili and Kellner caution, geopolitical concepts such as Eurasia, are dynamic by nature and must evolve in order to be able to make sense of the region they are supposed to cover.²⁰

Most frequently, however, Eurasia is considered as synonymous with the post-Soviet space. In this regard, organisations like the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) could find a new post-Soviet meaning, despite being merely a leftover from the dissolution of the Soviet Union.²¹ Laruelle argues that 'the term "Eurasia" largely attained greater visibility for want of something better: it expresses conveniently, and in a rather intuitive way, the historical space of Russia and its "peripheries."'.²² Similarly, Gleason argues that Eurasia as a term just replaced what had been Soviet territory. At the same time, he cautions against the analytical use of the term since there is no unity in the Eurasian space.²³ Vinokurov and Libman, however, argue against using Eurasia as a synonym for the post-Soviet space, because they see Eurasia as 'a continent and a venue for the emerging transcontinental processes of economic integration'.²⁴

Two interpretations can be highlighted with regard to Russia's role in the concept of Eurasia. Laruelle, for instance, sees three distinctive labels of Eurasia in use. In her interpretation, Eurasia can be seen as 'a geopolitical principle – that is, Russia's claim to be the "pivotal" state and "engine" of the post-Soviet world' or a 'philosophical principle – that is, Russia's status as the "other Europe,"' where Eurasia then becomes 'a *mirror* of Europe and the West, a *response* to what is perceived as a challenge that would undermine Russianness'.²⁵ The third use of Eurasia, according to Laruelle, is 'that of memory, mourning, and commemoration', through which the Russian society can come to terms with and understand the country's historical experiences (both imperial and Soviet) thus allowing for the 'closing of these historical chapters, [while]

¹⁹ Smith and Richardson 2017: 5

²⁰ Djalili and Kellner 2000: 134-135

²¹ Gabowitsch 2009: 25

²² Laruelle 2015a: 1

²³ Gleason 2010

²⁴ Vinokurov and Libman 2012: 28

²⁵ Laruelle 2015a:3 (emphasis in original)

at the same time integrating them into a national grand narrative'.²⁶ According to Tsygankov, Russian discourses on Eurasia can usefully be divided into two distinct groups each with its own metaphor, namely that of the 'fortress' and 'bridge': 'While the "fortress" metaphor presents Eurasia as a community with fixed cultural, political, and economic boundaries shielded from the outside, particularly the Western world, the "bridge" makes sense of the region in terms of its relative openness to outside influences'.²⁷

In recent years, there has also been a new trend to look beyond the traditional definition of Eurasia as post-Soviet space. Dutkiewicz thus calls for the revision of both the concept of and approach to Eurasia, arguing that the previous definition has become outdated.²⁸ It is not surprising that the idea and contours of Eurasia have attracted renewed interest following President Putin's call for the foundation of a Eurasian Union in 2011, and the subsequent efforts to foster economic integration in the region which ultimately led to the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015. Given that in 2013 China launched its own regional initiative, the One Belt, One Road initiative (OBOR), the space of Eurasia has opened up to new ideas, projects and concepts.²⁹

In the same context, Dutkiewicz advocates for an inclusive and open definition of Eurasia 'in classical geographic, spatial, "supra-territorial" or "transnational" terms, so it "does not belong" to and is not "embodied by" any particular state'.³⁰ This is also a call to move away from the traditional Russia-Eurasia binomial. Similarly, Hann argues in favour of a united Eurasia instead of a juxtaposed Europe and Asia. In his anthropologically grounded analysis, Hann argues that for centuries, Eurasia was characterized by its interconnectedness and should therefore be considered in a maximally inclusive way.³¹ Also Evers and Kaiser emphasise this notion and point out that 'the division of this vast area into two continents [Europe and Asia] is a pure

²⁶ Laruelle 2015a: 3

²⁷ Tsygankov 2016a: 64-65

²⁸ Dutkiewicz 2015: 2

²⁹ The Chinese One Belt, One Road initiative, launched by Chinese leader Xi Jinping in 2013 as his major foreign policy initiative, envisages a series of infrastructure and connectivity projects across the vast territory of Eurasia connecting China to many other parts of the world to enhance cooperation in the region of the ancient Silk Road (see Aris 2016; Godehardt 2016 for more detail).

³⁰ Dutkiewicz 2015: 5

³¹ Hann 2016.

fiction of the imagination of the human mind, a social and cultural construction of geographical space'.³² This position overlaps with my own approach in this study, which is to consider Eurasia as a geopolitical space that is constantly redefined by the political leaders of the countries in this space.

4.2 The concept of Eurasia in Russia

Russia is closely interlinked with the Eurasian space and for many centuries formed the core of a Eurasian empire. Over the course of its history, from the 16th century onwards, Russia's predecessor entities (the Tsardom of Muscovy, the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union) have continuously and contiguously expanded into the geopolitical space of Eurasia. For the last few centuries, Russia was the most central and most powerful actor in Eurasia which rendered the distinction between Russia and Eurasia somewhat obsolete.

There are many facets to Russia's relationship with and discourse on Eurasia. The subsequent section will shed light on some of these facets by first reviewing the philosophical current of Eurasianism, which emerged in the early 20th century, and Neo-Eurasianism, which gained popularity in post-Soviet Russia, before turning to contemporary debates on Eurasia including a discussion of the ongoing efforts to foster Eurasian integration. The focus lies on scholarly works on Eurasia and Eurasianism as well as the thinking of some notable Russian foreign policy analysts and thinkers. The governmental discourse on Eurasia is treated in depth in the following chapter on Russian foreign policy discourse on Eurasia.

4.2.1 Classical Eurasianism

Classical Eurasianism emerged in the 1920s among members of the Russian émigré society in Europe, most of whom fled the October Revolution in Russia. In short, its main argument is that Russia forms a distinct Eurasian civilisation which is neither European nor Asian. According to Badmaev, the conceptual foundation of Eurasianism contains three elements. The first one sees 'Eurasia as a specific cultural-geographical and sociohistorical entity'. The second element is the 'recognition that

³² Evers and Kaiser 2000: 1

independent development based on national cultural traditions, practices and values as well as centuries of contact between the Eurasian peoples is the only promising path for Eurasia'. And the third element is 'a multi-linear approach to understanding history that rejects the existence of a universal formula for cultural and historical development'.³³

Scholarship on the theories and ideas of Eurasianism is extensive and has received considerable attention following the dissolution of the Soviet Union both in Russia as well as abroad.³⁴ Since this study is concerned with contemporary ideas of Eurasia and the interpretation of Eurasia in Russian (and Turkish) foreign policy discourse, classical and neo-Eurasianism will only be treated briefly. Nevertheless, in order to embed the contemporary discourse in a historical context, it is important to set out the main arguments and ideas of Eurasianism and some of its most prominent thinkers such as Nikolai Trubetzkoy (1890-1938), Petr Savitsky (1895-1968) and George Vernadsky (1887–1973). Generally, Eurasianism unites a heterogeneous group of thinkers and as Bassin cautions, 'it is simply impossible to reduce Eurasianism in any meaningful way to a common set of doctrinal denominators'. Still, as he continues, one outstanding principal emerges which is that 'Eurasianism everywhere claims to represent some unique synthesis of European and Asian principles'.³⁵ Despite the argument that Eurasianism constitutes a heterogeneous group of thinkers and ideas, three overarching, yet strongly interlinked, themes can be identified: the Eurasianists' rejection of European modernity and domination; their interpretation of Eurasia as a contained geographical entity distinct from Europe and Asia, and Russia's centrality within this geography; and, their reading of Russian history focusing on the importance of the Mongol Empire as a building block for Russia's Eurasian destiny.

One of the key premises of Eurasianist thought was to set Russia apart from Europe. The general trend in Russia in the past and especially following the rein of Peter the Great, was to pursue a path of Europeanization, seeing Russia as a part of Europe. The Eurasianists, on the other hand, were critical of the European path to modernity and of

³³ Badmaev 2015: 33-34

³⁴ See, *inter alia*, Bassin 1991; Shlapentokh 1997; Laruelle 1999; Bassin 2003; Glebov 2003; Titov 2005; Wiederkehr 2007; Bassin 2008; Laruelle 2008a; Torbakov 2008; Glebov 2011; Bassin, Glebov and Laruelle 2015a.

³⁵ Bassin 2008: 281

what Trubetzkoy called the ‘Romano-Germanic’ world for its imperialism and contempt for the rest of the world. In his foundational treatise, *Europe and Mankind*, Trubetzkoy described a polar opposition and struggle between Europe and the non-Romano-Germanic peoples (‘mankind’) who had been colonised by Europe and who needed to finally emancipate themselves. This especially applied to Russia, which due to its Eurasian identity, could assume a leadership role in this struggle.³⁶ Eurasianism sees the world as being divided into distinct but equal cultures and civilisations with their own path of development.³⁷ As such, the cohesion of the Eurasian civilisation was formed over centuries, starting with the expansion of Genghis Khan’s Mongol empire across Eurasia. Bassin aptly summarises Trubetzkoy’s point of view on this matter:

The Eurasian continent had served as the arena for the formation and development of a distinct civilization and culture, a civilization that absorbed and blended both European and Asiatic elements, transforming them in the process into a homogeneous synthesis that belonged to neither realm.³⁸

The Eurasianists thus acknowledged the importance of Asian influences on Russia’s culture and in so doing downplayed the dominance of European influences. As a result, Russia was presented as part of a distinctive Eurasian culture with its own developmental path. This directly brings us to the second element, namely the geographical explanation of Russia’s Eurasian identity.

The Eurasianists based their postulates on a scientific foundation derived from a geographical reading of Eurasia. As such, they argued that ‘the unity of Eurasian territory is visible in its geometric and system nature [...], in the degree to which it lends itself to rationalization and explanation, and in its subjection to demonstrable scientific principles’.³⁹ Hence, Laruelle interprets Eurasianism as a ‘geographical ideology’.⁴⁰ Savitsky is the key thinker associated with the geographical theories behind Eurasianism. The premise for Savitsky’s vision of Russia’s and Eurasia’s geography becomes evident in this statement:

³⁶ Riasanovsky 1964

³⁷ Glebov 2003: 15

³⁸ Bassin 2003: 259

³⁹ Laruelle 2008a: 33

⁴⁰ Laruelle 2015b

Eurasia is indivisible. And therefore there is no “European” or “Asiatic” Russia, for the lands that are usually so designated are identically Eurasian lands. The Urals [...]merely] divide the country into cis-Urals Russia and trans-Urals Russia. We shall hear objections that the replacing of terminology is an empty pursuit. No, it is not: the preservation of the terms European and Asiatic Russia is incompatible with the understanding of Russia [...] as a special and integral geographical world.⁴¹

As a result, and given Russia’s belonging to Eurasia and its distinctiveness from Europe, Savitsky designated the term Russia-Eurasia to demonstrate the inseparability of the two. The Eurasianists went to great lengths to prove their theories by arguing, for instance, that the ‘Eurasian space was determined by the systemic correspondence between landscape, flora and fauna, and climate’.⁴² In addition, Savitsky argued that Eurasia was a ‘quatro-partite’ landmass, composed of four horizontal stripes classified from north to south as tundra, forest, steppe and desert.⁴³ Despite the existence of four different categories, Savitsky argued that these stripes ‘were welded together by a special unity that he derived (rather obscurely) from a physical-geographical balance or “symmetry” that he identified between the northern and southern extremes’.⁴⁴ This was the basis for the unity of the geographical entity Russia-Eurasia. However, among these four zones, the steppe zone stood out: ‘The steppe is the linchpin of Eurasia: it is the only strip that spreads across the whole Eurasian space from east to west and links the different civilizations of the Old Continent’.⁴⁵ This line of argument is important when we consider the third major argument present here, namely the historical interpretation of the Mongol experience as the stepping stone for the development of Russia-Eurasia.

At its origin, Eurasianism was primarily based on geographical, economic and linguistic theories, but it lacked historical depth. This is where Vernadsky comes into play, whose role in the Eurasianist movement was to provide the historical backbone for the theories of Trubetzkoy and Savitsky and presented Russian history as

⁴¹ Quoted in Bassin 1991: 14

⁴² Glebov 2003: 18

⁴³ Bassin 1991: 15

⁴⁴ Bassin 1991: 15

⁴⁵ Laruelle 2008a: 33

interlinked, if not synonymous, with Eurasian history.⁴⁶ On the basis that Eurasia was considered an undividable entity, Vernadsky theorised the history of Eurasia as a sequence of attempts by political units to gain control over this vast area. Among these, the Mongol empire attracted particular attention for its crucial role in uniting Eurasia. As Trubetzkoy argues:

Genghis Khan was successful in accomplishing the historical task set by the nature of Eurasia, the task of unifying this entire area into a single state, and he accomplished this task in the only way possible – by first unifying the entire steppe under his power, and through the steppe, the rest of Eurasia.⁴⁷

The Eurasianists' view was infused by historical determinism which defined the only possible existence of Eurasia as a single state unity. Genghis Khan and the Mongols were the first to achieve such unity and Russia was seen as their successor. As Laruelle argues, 'the Mongol Empire crystallized an experience of self-realization, formulated Eurasian identity geographically, and thus became the true driving force of Russia's entry into history'.⁴⁸ According to this line of argument, Russia merely took over from the Mongols and accomplished the task. As a result, according to Trubetzkoy, 'it was now possible for Russia-Eurasia to become a self-contained cultural, political, and economic region and to develop a unique Eurasian culture'.⁴⁹ However, it is interesting to note that ultimately the Eurasianists' reading of Eurasia's historical destiny as a single state comes to its end once Russia takes over as the shaper of and dominant power in Eurasia. It is at this moment, that Russia's history becomes synonymous with Eurasia's history and, as a consequence, 'reveals the Eurasianist agenda: to preserve the unity of the former imperial space at all costs'.⁵⁰

To summarise, the main elements of classical Eurasianism are to demonstrate Eurasia's geographical, cultural and historical cohesion and its existence as a unified civilisation distinct from Europe. As Trubetzkoy argued, 'by its very nature, Eurasia is historically destined to comprise a single state entity'.⁵¹ Within this logic, Russia

⁴⁶ Torbakov 2008

⁴⁷ Trubetzkoy 1991 [1925]: 166

⁴⁸ Laruelle 2008a: 41

⁴⁹ Trubetzkoy 1991 [1925]: 221

⁵⁰ Torbakov 2008: 14

⁵¹ Trubetzkoy 1991 [1925]: 165

occupies a central role as the unifier of Eurasia fulfilling the latter's historical destiny. One should not forget the historical context in which the Eurasianists developed their ideas. Having witnessed the crumbling of the Russian Empire and the rise of the Bolsheviks, which drove the Eurasianist thinkers into exile, they thought about ways to preserve Russian dominance over the vast area of Eurasia now that the Russian empire was gone. There is an interesting paradox here in that Eurasianism 'tried to preserve the Russian empire by denying its existence. There was no Russian empire, no Russia, only Eurasia, a harmonious, symphonic, organic association of peoples which constituted a higher historical and cultural unity'.⁵² Nevertheless, there can be no doubt about the Eurasianists' vision of Russia's role in Eurasia as the dominant power and unifying element. Laruelle neatly summarises the way in which Russia is at the centre of Eurasia:

The Russian people are in fact unlike any other people in Eurasia because they serve as the connecting element of Eurasian national diversity; without them, there would be no movement from one Eurasian element to another, there would be no whole giving meaning to its components. It is therefore solely under the aegis of the Russian people that the Eurasian nation is constituted. [...] Russia is Eurasian in its very principle, with or without Eurasia. The Eurasian supranationality actually constitutes a new expression of Russianness, which already includes national diversity.⁵³

Given the dominance of communist ideology, Eurasianist ideas were almost non-existent in Russia during Soviet times. In the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, however, Russians rediscovered geopolitical thought and with it the ideas of Eurasianist thinkers. Russia's new situation after the former Soviet territories became independent countries changed its geographic outlook because it was now simultaneously further away from Asia and from Europe, leading to the emergence of geopolitical theories and a revival of Eurasianist ideas.⁵⁴ According to Laruelle, the fact that neo-Eurasianist ideas provided Russia with an opportunity to 'restore a sense of Russia's continuity from its troubled history by recasting it in spatial rather than temporal terms' is what made it popular in the troubled early years of the existence of the Russian federation.⁵⁵ An important figure was Lev Gumilev (1912-1992) who can

⁵² Riasanovsky 1964: 215

⁵³ Laruelle 2008a: 39

⁵⁴ Kerr 1995; Smith 1999; Tsygankov 2003

⁵⁵ Laruelle 2008a: 1

be considered as the connecting link between classical and neo-Eurasianism, having stood in close contact with people such as Savitsky and Vernadsky and whose ideas experienced a remarkable revival in the post-Soviet period.

4.2.2 *Neo-Eurasianism*

This section will discuss the re-emergence of Eurasianist ideas in post-Soviet Russia. Arguably, the most important figure in this context is the geopolitician, philosopher and ideologue Alexander Dugin. Before examining his ideas, however, we will look at Lev Gumilev, the connecting link between classical and post-Soviet Eurasianism. Gumilev is essentially a Soviet thinker, having lived during the times of the Soviet Union, and he died shortly after the breakup of the USSR. He was an eclectic thinker, developing a wide range of ideas and theories. However, there is a debate whether Gumilev can actually be considered a Eurasianist or not. Laruelle, for instance, argues that Gumilev disagreed with many concepts of classical Eurasianism, and despite his correspondence with Savitsky and Vernadsky, Gumilev's ideas evolved in a different political and historical context, and he probably also lacked in-depth knowledge of the complete writings of Eurasianists.⁵⁶ The fact that Gumilev is considered a Eurasianist and gained much public accolade in post-Soviet Russia is because his disciples elevated him into this rank being the only Soviet scientist having worked in a Eurasianist framework.⁵⁷ A number of Gumilev's ideas are indeed strongly aligned with the classical Eurasianists and also resonate positively among the neo-Eurasianists. Among them are Gumilev's negative view of the West while considering Russia as an inherent part of Eurasian civilisation, his reading of geography as deterministic for the development of Russia-Eurasia and his positive interpretation of the influence of the Mongol Empire on the development of Russia as a Eurasian empire.

Gumilev's principal scholarly interest was the study of ethnic units (*ethnos-ethnies*) as principal 'categories of human organization' and the way in which they came into being and evolved over a specific period of time (*ethnogenesis*).⁵⁸ Russia's historical experience, according to Gumilev, is based on the ethnogeneses of various steppe peoples in the vast geographical space ranging from Eastern Europe to Mongolia,

⁵⁶ Laruelle 2008a: 57

⁵⁷ Titov 2005: 212-222

⁵⁸ Bassin 2016: 1-2

eventually forming a Eurasian community which was the basis for Russia's own development.⁵⁹ Within this historical Eurasian community, seven superethnies existed alongside each other, Russia being one of them. Interestingly, Gumilev's argument that Russia-Eurasia was comprised of seven different superethnies was in stark contrast to the classical Eurasianists who identified the same space 'as a single cultural-historical zone'.⁶⁰ However, in the last years of his life, Gumilev changed his mind and his thinking came to be aligned more directly with the classical Eurasianists. Instead of the seven superethnies making up the Eurasian space, he started to speak of a 'Eurasian superethnos' which included the Soviet Union but also other countries like Mongolia. What is more, the 'Eurasian superethnos' was also characterised by a political organisation and state structure, an argument on the basis of which 'Gumilev drew the obvious geopolitical conclusion that "any territorial question can be decided only on the basis of Eurasian unity"'.⁶¹ What laid the basis for Russia's territorial expansion across Eurasia and the eventual formation of the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union, was a 'natural affinity' between two of the superethnies in Eurasia: the Russian and the Steppe people.⁶² As we will see later, the Mongol empire was seen by Gumilev as instrumental in the foundation of Greater Russia and the subsequent central position of Russia in Eurasia.

Like the classical Eurasianists, Gumilev rejects Europe as a model of development for Russia on account of the neat geographical separation between Russia and Europe and the different stages of the European and Russian ethnos in their respective ethnogenesis, Russia being 500 years behind.⁶³ Furthermore, and this is where Russia's relations with the steppe people and the Mongols become crucial, Europe was seen as the principal enemy and menace for the development of the Russian ethnos. Contrary to the traditional reading of the Mongol yoke as a dark period of foreign occupation, Gumilev actually argued that 'the Mongols protected the nascent Russian ethnos from the Western military and religious aggression at a crucial time'.⁶⁴ While the Kievan Rus, which represented the first cycle of the Russian ethnogenesis, was in

⁵⁹ Bassin 2016: 83

⁶⁰ Bassin 2016: 107

⁶¹ Bassin 2016: 216

⁶² Titov 2005: 193

⁶³ Laruelle 2000: 186

⁶⁴ Titov 2005: 206

decline in the 12th century, the European (“Romano-Germanic”) superethnos was in expansion, aiming to absorb new lands and thus directly threatening the existence of the Rus.⁶⁵ At this crucial moment, Gumilev argues, the armies of the Mongols invaded Russian lands, but did not subjugate the peoples and thus prevented their domination by the West. Gumilev thus did not consider this period of Mongol domination (‘Mongol yoke’) negatively, but argued that it was a natural state of affairs, given the complementarity between the Russian and Steppe ethnies.⁶⁶ On the basis of this symbiosis, the Great Russian superethnos, which eventually came to dominate Eurasia, emerged in the 14th century following the gradual erosion and decline of the Golden Horde: ‘In the end it had been a natural development for the tsars of Moscow to assume the role of the Khan after the collapse of the Golden Horde’.⁶⁷ Gumilev’s interpretation of Russian history was highly favourable of the instrumental influence of the Mongol empire in the formation of Russia-Eurasia. As Bassin argues, in Gumilev’s view, ‘the legacy of Genghis Khan was not the destruction of the civilization of Ancient Rus’ but rather the creation of the modern Russian ethnos’.⁶⁸ As a result of this re-interpretation of Russian history, the idea of Russia having a European orientation or even being European is dismissed in favour of perceiving Russia as an inherently Eurasian entity.⁶⁹

Despite not being perfectly aligned with all of the ideas of classical Eurasianism, Gumilev nonetheless provides a line of continuity for the Neo-Eurasianists. One of the principal reasons for Gumilev’s popularity (not only among modern day Eurasianists) is the vast array of theories and ideas he developed, allowing other thinkers to cherry-pick their favourite elements and ideas. Indeed, as Bassin argues, ‘Gumilev has become a universal point of reference and metadiscourse in his own right: a venerable and apparently inexhaustible wellspring of ideas and inspiration for pretty much anyone seeking to make sense of the Russian past, present, and future’.⁷⁰ Over the last years, since the return of Putin to the Russian presidency in 2012, Gumilev also became a favourite in Kremlin circles and his ideas have been absorbed by many,

⁶⁵ Bassin 2016: 93-94

⁶⁶ Bassin 2016: 95-97

⁶⁷ Titov 2005: 209

⁶⁸ Bassin 2016: 103

⁶⁹ Titov 2005: 228

⁷⁰ Bassin 2016: 316

including Putin, who used some of his ideas and notions in his speeches.⁷¹ Furthermore, Gumilev was a crucial influence for the most prominent contemporary advocate of Eurasianism, Alexander Dugin,⁷² whose ideas are the subject of the next section.

Alexander Dugin (born in 1962), a former dissident and fringe political figure, has become a well-known person in Putin's Russia and his ideas are circulated widely. Especially among the security establishment, Dugin's ideas have received widespread attention.⁷³ Dugin is most famous for his geopolitical theories, which are influenced by European imperial geopolitics from the likes of Mackinder, but also from the ideas of classical Eurasianists. Indeed, Dugin sees himself as the contemporary representative of classical Eurasianism. Not only is his own thinking infused by their ideas, Dugin also contributed to the revival of Eurasianism in post-Soviet Russia through the dissemination of Eurasianist ideas by editing and reprinting their classical works.⁷⁴ The principal ideas of Dugin's theories with regard to Eurasia are his insistence on the singular character and imperial nature of the Eurasian civilisation (with Russia at its centre) and the geopolitically determined opposition between land-based Eurasia and the sea-based Atlantic world.

For Dugin, the main usefulness of Eurasianism is to justify and restore Russia's continuous imperial expansion across the former Soviet lands.⁷⁵ He highlights the decisive influence of the Mongol Empire on Russia's development, providing the latter with an 'empire building impulse' thus setting the basis for Russia's geopolitical mission in Eurasia.⁷⁶ Seeing Russia as the successor of Genghis Khan's Eurasian empire has important implications for Dugin's vision of the Russian state. As Shlapentokh argues, 'Russians care about the great Eurasian empire and they are not concerned with the well-being of Russia as a small state with a particular ethnic group'.⁷⁷ This interpretation is based on the reading of Russian history as essentially tied up with the formation of subsequent empires on the Eurasian landmass starting

⁷¹ Eltchaninoff 2016: 109-112

⁷² Bassin 2016: 227

⁷³ Dunlop 2004

⁷⁴ Bassin 2008: 282

⁷⁵ Wiederkehr 2004

⁷⁶ Ingram 2001: 1046

⁷⁷ Shlapentokh 2007b: 231

with the Mongol empire. Following this argument, Russia has never been a nation-state in the European understanding, but always a multi-ethnic entity. This essentially leaves Russia with two options: either evolve into a monoethnic state which is eventually poised to disappear or develop along the traditional axis, which signifies continuous expansion across Eurasia. It is obvious that Dugin only considers the second option to be viable given that ‘the imperial mission is actually implanted in Russia as a sort of historical genetic code’.⁷⁸ On top of this argument’s historical foundation, Dugin adds a geopolitical layer. Arguing that control over territory is a crucial component for guaranteeing the survival of the Russian state (or any state for that matter), Dugin naturally comes to the conclusion that ‘Russia must be a Eurasian empire’ or otherwise it will perish.⁷⁹

In his most important book, *The Foundations of Geopolitics: The Geopolitical Future of Russia*, published in 1997, Dugin develops the geopolitical theories which determine Russia’s position and its future in global affairs. His overarching concern is the preservation of Russia’s control over Eurasia and the continuation of the Russia-Eurasia empire. Dugin identifies one principal fault line in global geopolitics: the opposition between land-based Eurasianism and sea-based Atlanticism. This opposition is seen as inherently natural in that it is determined by geopolitical conditions. However, as Bassin maintains, Dugin departs from the classical Eurasianists with this definition since ‘Dugin no longer refers to [Eurasia’s] opponent as the West (*zapad*) but rather as the Atlantic world or, more simply, Atlanticism’.⁸⁰ Dugin thus updates Eurasianism to make sense of the Cold War bipolarity opposing the Soviet Union to the United States or the more recent political context which essentially signifies a global standoff between Eurasia and the United States.⁸¹ The struggle between Eurasia and the US for global dominance is not confined but takes place on a global level. Eurasia, led by Russia, thus becomes a ‘universal project’ and a ‘global alternative’ to US hegemony.⁸² In order to achieve parity, Russia needs to form alliances with other countries in the Eurasian heartland against the Atlanticist

⁷⁸ Shlapentokh 2007b: 230

⁷⁹ Ingram 2001: 1041

⁸⁰ Bassin 2008: 290

⁸¹ Bassin 2008: 290; see also Shlapentokh 2007a for a detailed analysis of Dugin’s opposition to US global dominance.

⁸² Bassin 2008: 294

world island. Three axes should be formed: in the West, a Moscow-Berlin axis, in the East, a Moscow-Tokyo axis and in the south, a Moscow-Teheran axis.⁸³ As Laruelle argues:

Dugin characterizes this quadruple alliance of Russia-Germany-Japan-Iran, which would react against the thalassocracies (the United States, Britain in Europe, China in Asia, and Turkey in the Muslim world), as a “confederation of large spaces”, because each ally is itself an empire that dominates the corresponding civilizational area.⁸⁴

However, despite acknowledging the imperial nature of its allies, Dugin leaves no doubt that Russia is the central actor in this alliance and the main building bloc of Eurasia ‘as it is geographically identical with the heartland, the most important space in Eurasian geopolitics, and is home to the Russian people, who are bearers of the unique Eurasianist mission’.⁸⁵ Interestingly, and in contrast to his Eurasianist predecessors, Dugin does not regard Europe as Russia’s main enemy. Rather, according to Dugin’s geopolitical determinism, Europe, being continental, should be opposed to Atlanticism and as such could actually become an ally for Russia in its struggle against US hegemony.⁸⁶ Despite this difference, in many aspects there is coherence between Dugin’s views and classical Eurasianism, most importantly in their view of Russia as a unique civilisation distinct from the West, their reading of Russian/Eurasian history, their understanding of Russia-Eurasia as composed of multiple ethnic layers and their insistence on empire as the only viable organisational unit for Russia. This last point is crucial and exemplified by the historical and political contexts in which Eurasianism and neo-Eurasianism developed, namely the breakup of the preeminent political unit in Eurasia into different states. The trauma of witnessing the demise of the Eurasian empire ultimately dictated their most important political goal: ‘the imperative to rescue out of the postrevolutionary chaos the traditional geopolitical cohesiveness of Eurasian space and reestablish thereby a unitary Eurasian state’.⁸⁷

⁸³ Dunlop 2002: 49-51

⁸⁴ Laruelle 2008a: 117

⁸⁵ Ingram 2001: 1037

⁸⁶ Bassin 2008: 290; Shlapentokh 2007a: 144

⁸⁷ Bassin 2008: 285

It has been argued that Dugin became a prominent figure in post-Soviet Russia and that his ideas have spread widely. Some analysts even argue that Dugin's theories reached the highest echelons of Russian power, influencing President Putin's policies.⁸⁸ However, Dugin's real influence remains unclear. Shekhovtsov, for instance, argues that while some of Putin's actions, such as the war in Georgia in 2008 and Russia's intervention in Ukraine starting in 2014, are certainly in line with Dugin's thinking and his blueprint for Russia, Putin's worldview is less ideological than Dugin's and he also never referred to Dugin in his speeches.⁸⁹ Dugin's position in Russian society and public life (as a former professor at Moscow State University and frequent public commentator), according to Umland, should be understood with regard to the concept of political technology which needs fringe figures to infuse the public space with their extreme ideas in contrast to which the Kremlin's own projects and ideas (such as the EAEU for example), seem rational and realistic.⁹⁰ However, it seems safe to affirm that Dugin's ideas, having inundated the discursive space of Russian politics and foreign policy over the last two decades, have not gone unnoticed and also entered official politics, if only via the backdoor.⁹¹

This cursory overview of the Eurasianist and neo-Eurasianist movements and ideas provides the background for the ensuing discussion on the concept of Eurasia in contemporary Russia. Hence, contemporary ideas are grounded in an established philosophical tradition, although one with a variety of proponents and theories. Precisely this, it has been argued, is one of the principal reasons for Eurasianism's increasing appeal in the post-Soviet period. It is important to note, however, that Eurasianism is not just a philosophical tradition, but also a political doctrine. Especially in its modern or Duginesque version, it offers political solutions and concrete prescriptions for Russia's development. In the past, the ideas of Eurasianists, especially those developed in exile, did not penetrate the walls of the Kremlin. In recent years, starting with Putin's third presidential term, the political context changed. With the implementation of Putin's pet project, the Eurasian Economic Union, a new vision for the post-Soviet development of Eurasia was formulated. In addition, the overall discourse in Russia became strongly infused with nationalistic and

⁸⁸ Barbashin and Thoburn 2014

⁸⁹ Shekhovtsov 2014

⁹⁰ Umland 2014: 5

⁹¹ Clover 2016

civilisational references, often along the lines of Eurasianist ideas.⁹² The classical Eurasianists would probably be surprised to learn that their long-forgotten ideas gained considerable political relevance in contemporary Russia.

Moving on from the philosophical discussion of Eurasianism, the following section is more interested in policy-relevant debates about Eurasia. Hence, the focus lies also on the link between Eurasianist ideas and the governmental elite's discourse as well as on Russian foreign policy. In this context, the recent Eurasian integration initiative and the newly established Eurasian (Economic) Union deserve special attention.

4.2.3 Eurasian ideas in Russia today

As the above discussion on Neo-Eurasianism demonstrated, the concept of the geopolitical space of Eurasia remains present in both Russian and general consciousness. Indeed, the continuous Russian expansion and incorporation of new Eurasian lands during imperial and Soviet times is one of the principal factors explaining the importance of Eurasia for Russia today.⁹³

We can trace the evolution of Russian thinking on Eurasia until the present moment. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Russian state found itself in a different geopolitical environment and its power was much reduced. Trenin called this the 'end of Eurasia', since Russia was no longer the nucleus of an empire and had lost its status as the 'center of gravity on the continent'.⁹⁴ In the 1990s, Russia did indeed withdraw from the wider Eurasian region and focused primarily on domestic issues. Ten years later, the very same author revoked his statement, claiming Eurasia was back, albeit with a new definition.⁹⁵ In the 2000s, after Russia stabilised and regained some of its regional power, Eurasia suddenly was a contested region. As such, Eurasia was not fully under Russian control but instead open to interactions among many actors and subject to influences from outside powers. In this space, Russia was just one among many actors with a diversified Eurasian strategy towards the different countries occupying the Eurasian space.⁹⁶ As Trenin argued, Moscow's position in

⁹² Clover 2016; Eltchaninoff 2016

⁹³ Kerr 2009: 76

⁹⁴ Trenin 2001: 12-13

⁹⁵ Trenin 2011

⁹⁶ Kerr 2009: 79

Eurasia changed in that Russia became ‘merely an element of the highly complex picture, no longer its core’.⁹⁷

However, this situation was also not long-lasting. While preparing his new and third bid for the presidential office in Russia, Vladimir Putin published several newspaper articles in 2011-2012 detailing his policy ideas. Among them was the proposition to establish the Eurasian Union, an integration project for the post-Soviet space. In so doing, Putin tried to reverse the picture painted by Trenin, restoring Russia as the central actor in Eurasia. When Putin re-acceded to the presidency in 2012, he swiftly moved to implement his Eurasian integration project which finally came into being in the form of the Eurasian Economic Union in January 2015. This final step, but also the changing international environment and geopolitical context in Europe, led some Russian observers to claim that 2015 was the ‘Eurasian year’ in Russian foreign policy.⁹⁸ Russia has thus come back to occupy – or at least to strongly claim – a central position in Eurasia. However, the exact form and definition of Eurasia is still unclear, and many different versions exist. As Eltchaninoff argues in a study about the philosophical underpinnings of Putin’s rule, Eurasia is a flexible idea which easily allows to move from the fixed geographical arena to the theoretical realm.⁹⁹ Laruelle makes a similar argument when stating that ‘in Russia, the term “Eurasia” has easily made a mark thanks to a certain terminological vacuum, enabling it to be adapted to shifting contexts and different realities’.¹⁰⁰

An important point in this context, and one that has also been made by Putin regarding Russia’s centrality in Eurasia, is the similarities between Russia and Eurasia. Put differently, Russia can be seen as a sort of ‘mini-Eurasia’. As Eltchaninoff argues, Russia being a vast, multi-ethnic country, can be considered a Eurasia in mini-format and thus predetermined to be a leader in Eurasia.¹⁰¹ Two Russian writers, who can be considered modern Eurasianists, emphasise the importance of the multi-ethnic nature of countries like Russia and Kazakhstan in their Eurasian endeavours. As such, ‘Eurasianism has a coherence that neither overpowers nor assimilates distinctive

⁹⁷ Trenin 2011: 83

⁹⁸ Bordachev 2015

⁹⁹ Eltchaninoff 2016: 143-144

¹⁰⁰ Laruelle 2015a: 3

¹⁰¹ Eltchaninoff 2016: 144

ethnic groups, but rather is nurtured by their distinctiveness'.¹⁰² In this reading, Russia is predestined to be a Eurasian power and lead Eurasian integration because of a similar experience in domestic politics, where Russia had to devise policies that accommodated a large number of different groups and constituencies.

As we have seen so far, the central element with regard to contemporary Russian ideas of Eurasia is Russia's centrality. However, there are two more elements that are also important to understanding Russian policies in Eurasia: Russia's quest for great power status and its defence of a multipolar world order. The former pertains to Russia's historical role in Eurasia in relation to the historical/imperial legacy dominated by Russia's contiguous imperial expansion across the Eurasian space, which conferred upon Moscow the status of a great power. The latter makes reference to the rejection by Russia's ruling elite of the unipolar world order under US hegemony while defending the realpolitik view of a multipolar world with a number of great powers co-existing in a sort of balance of power.

Moscow's self-perception as a great power and its efforts to maintain this status is a defining trait of its foreign policy.¹⁰³ The geopolitical theories and debates about Russia's place in the world following the dissolution of the Soviet Union led to the combination of the emerging discourses on Eurasia with Russia's status as a great power. In a survey of different geopolitical discourses, Berryman concludes that what they all have in common is the claim that if 'Russia wishes to remain a great power it needs to remain the strategic axis of Eurasia'.¹⁰⁴ Hence, Russia's global status as an important power is tied up with its presence in Eurasia and the dominating role it plays there. In addition, Russia also advocates for the establishment of a multipolar world order and rejects the global hegemony emanating from the US. The Russian academic Natalia Eremina, for instance, argues that in opposition to this unipolar US globalisation project, we are witnessing the establishment of a new Eurasian civilisational project which is held together by a common vision of the main Eurasian powers such as Russia, China and India. This project is defined by the rejection of the

¹⁰² Podberezkin and Podberezkina 2015: 48-49

¹⁰³ Mankoff 2009. See also the special issue of *Communist and Post-Communist studies* (Vol. 47, No. 3-4) focusing on 'Status and Emotions in Russian Foreign Policy'.

¹⁰⁴ Berryman 2012: 537

unipolar world order and instead ‘manifests multipolarity and multilateralism’.¹⁰⁵ On a national level, Russia developed the position that the new multipolar system was characterised by *realpolitik* and defence of national interests. In this context, Lukyanov argued, Russia concentrated on being the major power in Eurasia:

Moscow is now convinced that the future world order will be based on competitive interactions of principal centers of power and not on any one power’s domination. With this belief in future power structures, Russia has limited its immediate interests to Eurasia.¹⁰⁶

This short survey of Eurasian ideas in Russia today has illustrated the complexity of the concept of Eurasia and its various meanings. There are a number of strands within Eurasianist discourses advocating distinctive political visions and ideas. However, one can safely claim that Eurasia occupies a major role in Russian political and philosophical discourses. Yet, the extent to which such ideas influence the Russian political elite inside the Kremlin remains debated. As it is commonly argued, Eurasianists do not directly influence Putin and his inner circle, but their ideas have become more commonplace and mainstream in Russia in general.¹⁰⁷ This is echoed by some members of the analytical and academic community in Moscow, who argued that although the Eurasianists are gaining influence, they do not have impact on foreign policy even if their ideas are sometimes instrumentalised to justify certain actions.¹⁰⁸ As Schmid argues, the Russian state ideology is based on three strands which are neo-imperialism, a religious legitimisation through the orthodox church and, thirdly, a Eurasianist geopolitical underpinning.¹⁰⁹ However, reality is more complex and it is clear that Eurasianism is just one part of a broader policy. For instance, in a book chapter on the influence of the nationalist Izborsky Club, Tsygankov argues that the Kremlin does use some of the ideas of these nationalists and neo-Eurasianists while making clear that the Kremlin has the autonomy and flexibility to define its own Eurasianist agenda as it pleases.¹¹⁰ Hence, these people and their ideas can be used

¹⁰⁵ Eremina 2016: 170

¹⁰⁶ Lukyanov 2010: 28

¹⁰⁷ Clover 2016

¹⁰⁸ Interview with think tank analyst, Moscow, 12 May 2015; Interview with academic, Moscow, 1 June 2015

¹⁰⁹ Schmid 2015: 10

¹¹⁰ The Izborsky Club is a nationalist and anti-Western Russian think tank founded in 2012 and currently under the leadership of nationalist and Eurasianist writer Alexander Prokhanov. Among the club’s members are several anti-Western and anti-modernist Russian philosophers as well as the proponents of neo-Eurasianism such as Alexander Dugin. For more, see R. Götz 2015.

when needed, but overall the Kremlin and Putin have a more pragmatic discourse and outlook.¹¹¹

In the end, given the long journey of Eurasianist ideas from their original inception to contemporary Russian foreign policy, a lot of substance has been lost on the way. As Laruelle pointedly argues, ‘the more “Eurasia” invades Russia’s public space, popular culture, and state-produced narratives in Russia, the more forgetful of its Eurasianist founding ideologists it seems to be’.¹¹² Liik also makes a very similar point with regard to the Eurasian Union project: ‘the overlap between Putin’s project and the historical and theoretical Eurasianism put forward by earlier thinkers is almost accidental – except that both have their roots in Russia’s eternal need to define its place between Asia and Europe’.¹¹³ As has been demonstrated here, the flexible nature of the concept of Eurasia and its adaptability to different contexts is one of the major appeals of Eurasianist ideas, not just in philosophical circles but also at the centre of Russian power in the Kremlin.

4.2.4 Eurasian integration

In 2011, the concept of Eurasia experienced a new turn in Russian policy. In an article in the *Izvestia* newspaper, Putin outlined his vision of a Eurasian Union. It foresaw the establishment of a ‘powerful supranational association capable of becoming one of the poles in the modern world and serving as an efficient bridge between Europe and the dynamic Asia-Pacific region’.¹¹⁴ Putin described the proposed Eurasian Union as an open project and invited other countries, especially CIS members, to participate in the project. This was only logical, given that Putin stated that ‘the Eurasian Union will become a focal point for further integration processes since it will be formed by the gradual merging of existing institutions, the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space’.¹¹⁵ It took a few years to put the plan into practice. In May 2014, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia signed the treaty for the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union. This union focused principally on economic and not political issues and officially came into force in January 2015. In the same year, Armenia and

¹¹¹ Tsygankov 2016a

¹¹² Laruelle 2015a: 5

¹¹³ Liik 2014: 7

¹¹⁴ Putin 2011

¹¹⁵ Putin 2011

Kyrgyzstan joined as additional members. The Eurasian (Economic) Union added a new component to the discourse on Eurasia by trying to link it up with an institutional framework. As one think tank analyst argued, the EAEU can be considered Putin's 'pet project' and something he wants to leave as his legacy.¹¹⁶ For the first time after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a clear idea for the organisation of the space of Eurasia was proposed. As outlined by Putin, the Eurasian Union was a practical proposition devoid of a strong ideological foundation. However, as Pozo importantly reminds us, Putin's integration initiative and calling the proposed union 'Eurasian', prepared the ground for a variety of interpretations and a move of Eurasianist thought from the fringes of society to its centre stage.¹¹⁷

Furthermore, given the flexible nature and adaptability of the concept of Eurasia, the Eurasian Union project takes on a number of different meanings. For Richardson, Putin's reading of the EAEU is 'dialectical' in that it combines divergent strands of Eurasianist thinking ranging from civilisational to politico-economic interpretations.¹¹⁸ In general, we can distinguish between two sets of motives behind this Eurasian integration project. On the one hand, there are the economic motives such as the promotion of economic integration and trade, new economic opportunities and Russia's pivot to Asia. On the other hand, there are the geopolitical motives like Russia's claim to great power status, the promotion of a multipolar world order combined with countering Western hegemony and the will to establish Eurasia as a global region.

As Popescu argues, 'there are two Eurasian Unions: one real, and the other imaginary'.¹¹⁹ Libman uses the same analogy in arguing that there is a real EAEU and an imagined EAEU also in the discourse of the Russian academic community.¹²⁰ The 'real' EAEU is a regional organisation with member countries and institutions set up for running it. Similar to the European Union, the organisation is based on a treaty and there is a Eurasian Economic Commission and other institutions such as the Court of the Eurasian Economic Union. Indeed, the EAEU seemed to emulate integration

¹¹⁶ Interview with think tank analyst, Moscow, 12 May 2015

¹¹⁷ Pozo 2017: 168-169

¹¹⁸ Richardson 2015

¹¹⁹ Popescu 2014: 7

¹²⁰ Libman 2017

processes taking place elsewhere and was considered a forward-looking and pragmatic modernisation project.¹²¹ According to Libman, the ‘real’ EAEU is an organisation which actually shapes economic policy, but not always to the benefit of the Russian state, a fact which is often neglected in Russian discourse.¹²² While all this is certainly true, Roberts and Moshes argue that due to the unwillingness of member states to delegate sovereignty to a supranational institution the future development of the EAEU will be modest and probably meet with a similar fate as previous regional integration mechanisms.¹²³

The ‘imaginary’ Eurasian Union, on the other hand, is grounded in geopolitical aspirations to cement Russia’s position as a great power.¹²⁴ As Libman argues, the ‘imagined’ EAEU is the one mostly used in discourses by Russian politicians and academics, who see it as an ordering enterprise fostering Russia’s role in global politics as a positive force and as a leader of a real economic bloc.¹²⁵ Similarly, Russian political analyst Lukyanov argues that the EAEU is grounded in two motives. Originally economic, it then moved to become something bigger with a civilisational underpinning: ‘Eurasian integration was initially political and economic in nature, whereas now it has become part of the domestic discourse on Russia’s new identity’.¹²⁶ The EAEU is thus a perfect political vehicle for Russia to achieve its foreign policy goals. As Bordachev and Skriba argue, Russia’s efforts to integrate Eurasia are also driven by Russia’s quest to be a great power. As a result, ‘regaining geopolitical control over the post-Soviet space through the Eurasian project is thus more a means than an end in itself’.¹²⁷

As has been illustrated earlier, among Russia’s foreign policy priorities are the establishment of a multipolar world order and the restoration of Russia’s great power status. In this context, the world is divided into regions dominated by the respective regional hegemon. A role which Russia takes on in Eurasia. As Sakwa argues:

¹²¹ Dragneva and Wolczuk 2012

¹²² Libman 2017: 88-91

¹²³ Roberts and Moshes 2016

¹²⁴ Popescu 2014: 19

¹²⁵ Libman 2017: 84-88

¹²⁶ Lukyanov 2015: 298

¹²⁷ Bordachev and Skriba 2014: 22

the development of what has now become the EEU [EAEU] is an attempt to establish Eurasia as a distinct pillar of a multipolar international system – to maintain its political subjectivity in the face of a potential struggle between external hegemonic powers.¹²⁸

Therefore, Lukin argues, the Eurasian integration project should not be seen as a neo-imperial project, but merely responding to the developments in global politics which are slowly overcoming the unipolar moment with the ‘rise of the East’ and China in particular.¹²⁹ In addition, Lukin argues that the unipolar moment has pushed countries like Russia to pursue their own integration projects because they were rejected by the West as equal partners.¹³⁰ The EAEU thus also becomes an important instrument in Russian attempts to counter US hegemony. As Podberezkin and Podberezkina argue, one of the principles of the EAEU is ‘a multi-polar world opposed to US hegemony’.¹³¹ In such a system, ‘the balance achieved by several regional poles of influence will lead to a fair system for allocating forces and dividing up spheres of influence’.¹³² Therefore Russia invests a lot of financial and diplomatic capital in promoting and developing this union as a long-time investment in hedging against the influence of other actors such as the EU and China in the post-Soviet space.¹³³ Hence, the EAEU is not just a regional integration initiative, but there is also a wider geopolitical rationale to it.

In addition, in recent years, and especially following the deterioration of relations between Russia and the West in the context of the Ukraine crisis, yet another dimension was added to the EAEU. Sergey Glazyev, Putin’s top advisor for Eurasian integration, argues that while economic integration is currently at the core of the EAEU, a stronger ideological component should eventually be included as well. In his view, the EAEU needs ‘to rise above pure economics, which is currently the essence of integration, and expand the definition to include the philosophical origins of Eurasianism and the coherent nature of the new association’.¹³⁴ In another piece, Glazyev and Tkachuk argue that what makes Eurasian integration distinctive from other integration projects is ‘its ideological foundation’, which is based on ideas

¹²⁸ Sakwa 2016: 16

¹²⁹ Lukin 2014b

¹³⁰ Lukin 2014a: 46

¹³¹ Podberezkin and Podberezkina 2015: 51

¹³² Podberezkin and Podberezkina 2015: 51

¹³³ Pozo 2017: 172

¹³⁴ Glazyev 2015: 87

developed by the early Eurasianists who argued that ‘Eurasian states share a cultural and historic environment, as well as an entrenched Eurasian political tradition and principles of governance’.¹³⁵ Therefore ‘economic integration in the post-Soviet space should be viewed as a logical, historically justified and economically viable process’.¹³⁶ Similarly to others, Glazyev argues against seeing the EAEU in a neo-imperial light and sets it apart from previous Russian experiences such as the Soviet Union and the imperial periods before it. The reason therefore is that Eurasian integration is ‘based on the philosophy of Eurasianism, whose basic principles were set forth by 20th century Russian thinkers as they pondered over forms of post-Soviet unification of the peoples of the former Russian Empire’.¹³⁷ Glazyev is not the only one to think in those terms. In the context of what Russia perceives as the global imposition of the US/Western model and values (which it rejects), the EAEU gains a new meaning. As Lukin argues, ‘the culture and values of many former Soviet republics really do differ from what prevails in the West’.¹³⁸ Lukin narrows down the ‘clash of values’ to the rejection of Western liberalism, with its ideals of personal freedom and self-fulfilment, by many people in the post-Soviet states from Russia to Central Asia who from a religious standpoint cannot share what they see as Western decadence. As a result, according to Lukin, ‘these beliefs have propelled to power leaders who support the integration of the former Soviet republics’.¹³⁹ On a more political and state level then, other values emerge. In this regard, as Podberezkin and Podberezkina argue, ‘the originality of Eurasian civilization and the need to preserve and develop it as a guarantee of national and state sovereignty are currently emerging as the informal ideological basis of efforts to promote Eurasian integration’.¹⁴⁰ Glazyev also stresses the importance of state sovereignty as a key element in the Eurasian integration project and a pull-factor for potential member states by declaring that ‘mutual respect for national sovereignty is what makes the Eurasian integration different from all previous models’.¹⁴¹ However, Roberts and Moshes argue that despite some early achievements, the EEU is very much limited to reproducing

¹³⁵ Glazyev and Tkachuk 2015: 61

¹³⁶ Glazyev and Tkachuk 2015: 61

¹³⁷ Glazyev 2013

¹³⁸ Lukin 2014b: 92

¹³⁹ Lukin 2014b: 92-93

¹⁴⁰ Podberezkin and Podberezkina 2015: 47.

¹⁴¹ Glazyev 2013

sovereignty rather than transforming it, marking a clear disconnect between rhetoric and reality.¹⁴²

To summarise, there are three dimensions to the EAEU project: the economic, the geopolitical and the civilisational. Political analysts as well as Russia's governmental elite have alluded to all three levels when speaking about Eurasian integration. The EAEU is thus best explained by seeing it as a hybrid project with both pragmatic political and economic components as well as a tool for Russian foreign policy in order to achieve its principal goals such as establishing a multipolar world order with Eurasia as a core region and reinstating Russia's great power status based on its claim for leadership in Eurasia.¹⁴³

4.3 The concept of Eurasia in Turkey

Turkey's geography and concomitant geopolitical significance by being the meeting point of continents and cultures has a strong impact on Turkish foreign policy. Together with Russia, Turkey is the only country that straddles both the European and Asian continents. From a purely geographical point of view, Turkey is a Eurasian country. However, the concept of Eurasia in Turkey and Turkish Eurasianism are much less prominent than in the case of Russia. Similarly, a philosophical tradition akin to Eurasianist thought in Russia is absent in the case of Turkey. It was only through external circumstances that Eurasia started to occupy a more central position in Turkey. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new independent states in Central Asia and the Caucasus, Turkey started taking a stronger interest in the Eurasian region.¹⁴⁴

4.3.1 The discovery of Eurasia

In the years following the end of the Cold War, Eurasia provided the Turkish political elite with a geopolitical identity and discourse it could use in order to shape a new place for itself in the changed international system. Since the establishment of the republic in 1923, Turkey was firmly rooted in and oriented towards the West, since

¹⁴² Roberts and Moshes 2016

¹⁴³ A detailed analysis of the discourse of Russia's governing elite with regard to Eurasia will be provided in the next chapter.

¹⁴⁴ Erşen 2014a: 187

the 1950s as part of NATO, and the eastern-most frontier against the Soviet threat. Based on an analysis of political discourses with regard to the geopolitical metaphor of Turkey as a ‘bridge’, Yanik argues that:

suddenly other continents worth “bridging” appeared on the maps of Turkish officials: Asia, Central Asia, West Asia, but most importantly, Eurasia. Turkish officials perceived and portrayed Turkey as located in the “heart” of Eurasia, and as helping to reunite two continents that had been separated for years: Europe and Asia.¹⁴⁵

Eurasia was not a familiar concept in Turkey until the disintegration of the Soviet Union after which it became increasingly popular.¹⁴⁶ In the 1990s, Eurasia was mostly used to denote the newly independent states of the Caucasus and Central Asia (thus replacing the traditionally used term ‘Turan’),¹⁴⁷ most of whom share religious and ethnic ties with Turkey.

This sudden Eurasian opening provided new opportunities for Turkey. On the basis of the argument that Turkey shared a common history and linguistic ties with the Turkic peoples of Central Asia, Ankara saw itself as a ‘big brother’ to these countries, facilitating their integration into the global system.¹⁴⁸ Prime Minister Demirel, in office from 1991 to 1993 (and then President until 2000) was an early promoter of the idea of Eurasia, referring to the area stretching ‘from the Adriatic Sea to the Great Wall of China’ populated by Turkic peoples.¹⁴⁹ Such claims were not based on an ideological or civilisational understanding of foreign policy. Rather, this was based on pragmatic considerations trying to strengthen Turkey’s position as a regional power and opening up new avenues for economic opportunities. As Prime Minister Demirel stated, Turkey would support the countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus, which he called a Eurasian community, and ‘lead them to the world’.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, for Demirel, Turkey’s Eurasian geography was instrumental in relations with the EU since this would help the latter establish relations with countries in Eurasia while Turkey would act as a ‘door to Eurasia’.¹⁵¹ Concretely, Turkey’s ruling elite at the time

¹⁴⁵ Yanik 2009: 537

¹⁴⁶ Imanbeyli 2015: 146

¹⁴⁷ Imanbeyli 2015: 146

¹⁴⁸ Aras 2002: 1-2

¹⁴⁹ Erşen 2013: 27

¹⁵⁰ Bozdağlioğlu 2003: 98

¹⁵¹ Erşen 2013: 29

foresaw the construction of pipelines passing through Turkey which would allow the newly independent states to its east an alternative route to export their energy resources to Europe. Prime Minister Demirel referred to this goal as the ‘Eurasian project’.¹⁵² Hence, Turkish policy makers were prompted ‘to place Turkey in the “center” or “hub” of Eurasia’.¹⁵³

Two of the most influential politicians with regard to Turkey’s vision of Eurasia (before the AKP period which started in 2002 and which is the main focus of this thesis) were Turgut Özal, who was Turkey’s prime minister from 1983 to 1989 and then president from 1989 to 1993, and Ismail Cem, Turkey’s foreign minister from 1997 to 2002. These two politicians are also important in that they laid the basis for Turkey’s ‘new geographic imagination’, which was later espoused by the AKP government, by opening up the space of Eurasia to Turkey.¹⁵⁴ Foreign Minister Cem was an especially prominent and vocal promoter of Turkish engagement in Eurasia. His foreign policy vision and goals will be discussed in detail here because some of his ideas later reappeared in the AKP discourse, particularly in Ahmet Davutoğlu’s thinking. However, the policies under Prime Minister and later President Turgut Özal laid the foundation for Cem’s approach. Turgut Özal’s time in power coincided with the end of the Cold War and the sweeping changes to Turkey’s neighbourhood with the independence of the former Soviet republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia. For Özal, this new environment provided important opportunities for Turkey to play a bigger role in regional politics, but also to demonstrate its continued importance to its Western allies.¹⁵⁵ What is important here, is that Özal based his foreign policy vision on a historical reading of Turkey as the heir of the Ottoman empire. As a result, Turkey was portrayed as a Eurasian power as opposed to being a European country with no links to the East. In this conception, the Muslim countries in the Balkans and the Turkic republics of the former Soviet Union received special attention.¹⁵⁶

While conceding that Turgut Özal was instrumental in building relations to the Caucasus and Central Asia, Cem credits himself with having introduced the Eurasian

¹⁵² Erşen 2013: 30

¹⁵³ Yanik 2011: 85

¹⁵⁴ Bilgin and Bilgic 2011: 187

¹⁵⁵ Danforth 2008: 88-90

¹⁵⁶ Ataman 2002: 133

dimension into Turkish foreign policy: ‘The Eurasian dimension is a new element that I have introduced to our foreign policy. [...] Turkey has all the strategic, historical and cultural attributes, which provide it the opportunity to play a decisive role in the emerging Eurasian reality’.¹⁵⁷ In the first press conference Cem gave as foreign minister in 1997, he made the following statement about Turkey’s role in Eurasia and the international system more generally, which is worth reproducing here in full:

Turkey is now able to stand out in the international arena as a genuine and influential actor, as a player with an identity that is unique and strong. Within this promising environment, the dynamics of Turkey’s aspiration to be a Eurasian power center are taking shape. Eurasia is the union of Europe and Asia, two continents that are becoming increasingly more interdependent and complementary in the new realities of globalization and technology. Eurasia will be the powerhouse of global development in the 21st century thanks to its energy resources and to the rapid growth in trade opportunities. In this process, Turkey ceases to be a suburb or an outpost of Europe. Turkey of course is European and has been so for the last seven hundred years. But her horizons are not limited to that. Turkey is confronted by two great goals that are equally important: the first is to become a member of the European Union; the second is to become a decisive center in a Eurasia that is no longer just a geographical concept but is on the way to becoming an economic, social and political reality.¹⁵⁸

The Caucasus and Central Asia occupy a central role and provide the backbone for this historical and cultural reading of Turkish foreign policy. Thanks to the changing regional dynamics in the post-Cold War world, Turkey could claim a central position in Eurasia. As Cem argued, ‘out of the multitude of those “new” states, almost all – in the Balkans, in the Caucasus or in Central Asia – are those with whom Turkey shares a mutual history, religion or language’.¹⁵⁹ As a result, and ‘by virtue of her historical and cultural attributes and her privileged identity, European as well as Asian, Turkey is firmly positioned to become the strategic “center” of Eurasia’.¹⁶⁰ Hence, Cem was pivotal in developing a vision of Eurasia and Turkey’s place within this environment. Based on the shared history and culture with the Turkic republics in Central Asia and on Turkey’s geographical location on both the European and Asian continent, Cem

¹⁵⁷ Cem 2001: 20

¹⁵⁸ Cem 2001: 44

¹⁵⁹ Cem 2001: 68

¹⁶⁰ Cem 2002: 5

aimed for Turkey to occupy a ‘pivotal role in the emerging Eurasian reality’.¹⁶¹ His ideas and his emphasis on historical and cultural factors as fundamental elements of Turkish foreign policy had a lasting impact.

Based on a geopolitical reading of Turkey’s geographical location at the intersection of continents and regions coupled with the changed regional environment and the emergence of newly independent countries, the concept of Eurasia quickly attained the highest levels of Turkey’s governing elite during the 1990s. This also remained the case in the 2000s, even though the meaning of Eurasia and its interpretation by the ruling elite evolved. Indeed, in Turkey there were different competing visions of Eurasianism which will be examined in more detail in the next section.

4.3.2 Diverging visions of Turkish Eurasianism

Eurasianism as a philosophical current in Turkey is much less developed than in Russia. In recent years, however, both the concept of Eurasia and Eurasianist discourses have become more prominent. Aktürk for instance argues that Eurasianism developed into a school of thought and a geopolitical identity – a ‘fourth pole’ next to Westernism, Turkism and Islamism.¹⁶² According to Erşen, the changed geopolitical landscape in the post-Soviet period had an important impact in that it ‘has turned Eurasia into a unique concept in Turkish geopolitical thinking – one that has blended discourses like Pan-Turkism, Eurasianism and Neo-Ottomanism, each searching for a new regional leadership role for Turkey in the twenty-first century’.¹⁶³

In the Turkish context, there is no single ideology of Eurasianism but a variety of interpretations and meanings.¹⁶⁴ Within this hybrid geopolitical concept, we can identify three different versions of it in contemporary Turkey, each of which again is a mix between diverse strands and groups. As a result, the characterisation of each version either makes reference to its ideological or geographical roots. The first version is Kemalist/socialist Eurasianism or, according to its geographical focus, ‘Asia-centered’.¹⁶⁵ The second version is the Nationalist or ‘Turkic-world-centered’

¹⁶¹ Cem 2002: 2

¹⁶² Aktürk 2004; 2015

¹⁶³ Erşen 2013: 25

¹⁶⁴ Erşen 2017a: 267

¹⁶⁵ Akçali and Perinçek 2009; Eren-Webb 2011: 69; Tüysüzoğlu 2014: 98; Erşen 2016: 57

Eurasianist tradition.¹⁶⁶ The third version of Eurasianism in Turkey is conservative or ‘Moslem-world-centered’.¹⁶⁷

Adherents of the socialist/Kemalist version of Eurasianism perceive Turkey’s traditional European orientation as contrary to Turkey’s interests.¹⁶⁸ Instead, the orientation of socialist Eurasianism is towards other Eurasian powers, such as Russia, China, but also countries like Iran and India, which are seen as partners and allies against the West. In terms of historical reference, this version of Eurasianism sees Turkey as part of an anti-imperial Western movement due to the revolutionary nature of the early years of the establishment of the republic.¹⁶⁹ This tradition of Eurasianism is rather marginal, albeit it gained some traction in the 1990s due to the EU’s reluctance to favour Turkey’s accession and later on following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the accession of Cyprus to the EU in 2004, as well as a general warming of relations with Russia.¹⁷⁰ According to Akçali and Perinçek, ‘the anti-imperial dimension of Kemalism’ provided the backbone for this Eurasianism and the emphasis on the need to ally with other anti-Western forces in the Eurasian space, such as Russia and China, was thus particularly strong.¹⁷¹ Overall, this tradition defines Eurasia less in geographical than in ideological terms as anti-West and regrouping the oppressed third world peoples.¹⁷²

This school of thought has also been called ‘Dugin’s Turkish branch’, since it comes close to the thinking of Russian Eurasianist Alexander Dugin.¹⁷³ Dugin indeed attempted to expand his Eurasianist movement into Turkey and promoted close relations between Russia and Turkey, especially in the context of a common Eurasian identity. Some of his writings have been translated into Turkish and he managed to gain some marginal influence and followers among military circles and left-wing political parties. Especially his partnership and alliance with the leader of the Workers’ Party, Dogu Perinçek, allowed him to anchor his Eurasianist movement in Turkey and

¹⁶⁶ Eren-Webb 2011: 69; Tüysüzoğlu 2014: 98; Erşen 2016: 57

¹⁶⁷ Eren-Webb 2011: 69; Tüysüzoğlu 2014: 98; Erşen 2016: 57

¹⁶⁸ Erşen 2016: 60-61

¹⁶⁹ Eren-Webb 2011: 69

¹⁷⁰ Akçali and Perincek 2009: 566

¹⁷¹ Akçali and Perincek 2009: 560

¹⁷² Erşen 2016: 61

¹⁷³ Tüysüzoğlu 2014: 98

somewhat expand his influence. However, given Perinçek's own weak standing in Turkish politics (his party usually performed very poorly in elections) and the fact that he spent six years in prison following the infamous Ergenekon investigation, Dugin's overall influence in Turkey remained limited.¹⁷⁴

The 'Russian dimension' is an important theme in the socialist Eurasianist discourse. In contrast to the above discussion, Aktürk puts forward a narrower definition of Turkish Eurasianism which is based on a 'pro-Russian orientation abroad and socialist-nationalist government at home'.¹⁷⁵ In his view, Europe is seen as Turkey's 'Other' and the Eurasianist vision is developed as a reaction to the 'European idea' which promotes Turkish membership in the EU.¹⁷⁶ Eurasianism is a revisionist geopolitical vision in that it tries to 'reconcile and overcome five centuries of uninterrupted rivalry and enmity between Turkey and Russia'.¹⁷⁷ As such, this version of Eurasianism distinguishes itself from the Pan-Turkist version of Eurasianism which also advocates for Turkey to expand its power across Eurasia, but in competition to Russia instead of with Russia as an ally. On the contrary, the principal goal of Eurasianists, according to Aktürk, is 'to change Turkey's foreign policy such that Russia would be Turkey's primary ally'.¹⁷⁸

The nationalist or Turkic-world centred geopolitical vision of Eurasia is closely linked to the Turkic post-Soviet republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus. This vision has been dominant in the 1990s with attempts by Ankara to increase its influence in Central Asia and essentially promotes a strong alliance with these countries.¹⁷⁹ Eurasianism becomes almost synonymous with Pan-Turkism, a political movement that aims to bring together all the Turkic people in an alliance, and provides the ideological foundation for Turkey's attempts to draw the other Turkic countries into its orbit.¹⁸⁰ There are essentially two definitions of Eurasia in this version. The more geographical definition considers Eurasia simply as the region where Europe and Asia meet, with Turkey in a prime location, and Azerbaijan serving as the geographical link between

¹⁷⁴ Laruelle 2008b; Imanbeyli 2015

¹⁷⁵ Aktürk 2015: 55

¹⁷⁶ Aktürk 2004: 212

¹⁷⁷ Aktürk 2004: 209

¹⁷⁸ Aktürk 2015: 57

¹⁷⁹ Erşen 2016: 57

¹⁸⁰ De Tapia 2009: 342-343; Eren-Webb 2011: 69

Turkey and Central Asia.¹⁸¹ The second definition is more ideological or ethnic in that it refers to the entire area of ‘Turkistan’ in which Turkic peoples and communities live.¹⁸²

At the heart of this version of Eurasianism, which is close to the nationalist MHP party, are notions of ethnic, cultural and linguistic closeness between Turkey and the Turkic peoples living in the heart of Eurasia. The nationalist version of Eurasianism is thus a rather narrow and exclusive concept based on a common Turkish identity.¹⁸³ In addition, it is also historically rooted by referring to the pre-Ottoman history of Turkish tribes and peoples living in the Eurasian space. As a result of this ethnic and cultural definition, nationalist Eurasianists consider ‘regionalization in Eurasia a sociological, historical and political necessity’.¹⁸⁴ Contrary to the socialist/Kemalist vision of Eurasianism, the Turkic-world-centred approach argues that Turkey occupies a central position in Eurasia. However, there is disagreement about the role of other powers, above all Russia, in this conception of Eurasia. For some, Russia is included in the concept and is even a partner,¹⁸⁵ while others argue that Russia is a competitor for influence in Eurasia.¹⁸⁶ In general, this version of Eurasianism has had a lasting impact on Turkish foreign policy under a different heading. As Köstem argues, the ‘Turkic world’ concept, which calls for the establishment of close political, economic and cultural ties with the Turkic states of Eurasia and was originally integrated into Turkish foreign policy discourse by non-state actors, has become an ‘institutionalized’ concept also during the AKP government.¹⁸⁷

The conservative or Moslem-world-centred strand of Eurasianism can actually only marginally be considered a Eurasianist geopolitical vision. Its focus lies on ‘establishing a sphere of influence in the former territories of the Ottoman empire’.¹⁸⁸ However, the Ottoman Empire’s geographical reach only touched the frontiers of Eurasia and was oriented much more towards the Middle East, Northern Africa and

¹⁸¹ Erşen 2016: 59

¹⁸² Eren-Webb 2011: 69; Erşen 2016: 59

¹⁸³ Erşen 2016: 59

¹⁸⁴ Eren-Webb 2011: 69

¹⁸⁵ Eren-Webb 2011: 69; Tüfekçi 2014: 279

¹⁸⁶ Tüysüzoğlu 2014: 98

¹⁸⁷ Köstem 2017

¹⁸⁸ Erşen 2016: 64

Southeast Europe. In this regard, conservative Eurasianism refers to the ‘Ottoman world within its broadest boundaries’ and sees a prominent role for Turkey as a leader in this geography.¹⁸⁹ The reference points are cultural closeness and a shared religion as well as historical references to Turkey’s role as centre of the Ottoman Empire and the necessity to revive that role in a modern version.¹⁹⁰ In a sense, the Moslem-world-centred Eurasianism is a grandiose concept in that it reunites a ‘much larger geography, one including not only Central Asia and the Caucasus, but also the Middle East and even North Africa’.¹⁹¹ Hence, there is ‘mutual complementariness of Turkish Eurasianism and neo-Ottomanism’,¹⁹² which makes conservative Eurasianism a rather hybrid and analytically vague concept. However, it is interesting to note the geopolitical and cultural associations made in this version of Eurasianism. We will come back to this in the next section when analysing the geopolitical vision of Ahmet Davutoğlu.

In sum, these three versions of Eurasianism have all had some impact in Turkey while remaining rather marginal. Interestingly, it can also be argued whether they deserve to be called Eurasianist visions. According to Eren-Webb, ‘among the three, only socialist Eurasianists openly claim that Turks are Eurasians. To conservative democrat Eurasianists, Turks are Ottomans (a reference to religion) and for nationalist Eurasianists Turks are Turks (a reference to ethnicity)’.¹⁹³ In addition, Eurasianist discourses in Turkey are generally based much more on a pragmatic understanding of Turkish interests and ambitions than on an ideological understanding. Therefore, Eurasia’s boundaries and the geographical description of the Eurasian space in Turkey varies. As Erşen argues, the important aspect is that the concept of Eurasia serves ‘to highlight the “exceptional geopolitical importance” of Turkey as a country that bridges and influences different regions, continents, religions and civilizations’ and that ultimately, ‘Eurasia only acquires geopolitical significance when Turkey is imagined as its focus or leader’.¹⁹⁴ A former Turkish diplomat for instance argued that Turkey’s Eurasian position and argumentation goes hand in hand with its ambition to becoming

¹⁸⁹ Tüysüzoğlu 2014: 98

¹⁹⁰ Eren-Webb 2011: 69-70

¹⁹¹ Erşen 2017a: 276

¹⁹² Tüysüzoğlu 2014: 98

¹⁹³ Eren-Webb 2011: 69

¹⁹⁴ Erşen 2016: 67

a member of the European Union: ‘Turkey would see its long-term benefits and interests in becoming a more central figure in Eurasia, rather than being a periphery of the EU. However, it’s not one or another and there is no hesitation in our orientation which is towards the EU. But to maximise our interests in Europe we think we would be much more in demand in a Eurasian concept’.¹⁹⁵ Similarly, when we go back to Ismail Cem, the former foreign minister of Turkey, Turkish foreign policy had two principal goals, namely becoming a member of the EU as well as placing Turkey at the centre of the new Eurasian region. Indeed, Cem argued that the ‘two goals are not at all contradictory: in fact, they complement and reinforce one another’.¹⁹⁶ Overall, we can thus speak of a pragmatic Eurasianism which has prevailed, and which essentially puts Turkey’s economic and political interests in the first place while sometimes using Eurasianist logic and ideas as explanation.

4.3.3 Afro-Eurasia

The cursory overview above presented the principal strands of Eurasianism in Turkey. It has been argued that these ideas have been marginal both politically and ideologically. However, after the coming to power of the AKP, a distinctive geopolitical vision in Turkish foreign policy, which is close to the third interpretation of Turkish Eurasianism, became dominant.

Ahmet Davutoğlu, a former academic and advisor to Prime Minister Erdoğan, who then became Foreign Minister and later Prime Minister, developed a new concept and vision of Eurasia. He referred to the vast geopolitical region in which Turkey is located as ‘Afro-Eurasia’. As Davutoğlu explained in a policy brief written as foreign minister in 2014: ‘Turkey used to be known as a Eurasian state, but for the past five to six years we have been calling ourselves an “Afro-Eurasian state”, because we are at the center of the mainland of all human history’.¹⁹⁷ The definition of Afro-Eurasia essentially involves the traditional Eurasia inhabited by Turkic peoples and communities with the addition of the former Ottoman lands in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). As Davutoğlu argued, ‘Turkey holds an optimal place in the sense that it is both an Asian and European country and is also close to Africa through the Eastern

¹⁹⁵ Interview with former Turkish diplomat and think tank analyst, Ankara, 5 February 2015

¹⁹⁶ Cem 2002: 4

¹⁹⁷ Davutoğlu 2014: 19

Mediterranean'.¹⁹⁸ This essentially defined Turkey with multiple identities through its links to multiple geographical regions. In an article explaining his foreign policy vision, Davutoğlu wrote: 'In terms of geography, Turkey occupies a unique space. As a large country in the midst of Afro-Eurasia's vast landmass it may be defined as a central country with multiple regional identities that cannot be reduced to one unified character'.¹⁹⁹ By including the Middle East and North Africa, Davutoğlu enlarges his concept of Eurasia to that of Afro-Eurasia. In so doing, his concept strongly resembles traditional geopolitical concepts, such as Mackinder's heartland theory, which equates geopolitical control over territory with influence in global affairs.²⁰⁰ In general, Davutoğlu's writing is strongly influenced by classical imperial geopolitics and writers such as Mackinder and Mahan, whose concepts he uses in order to demonstrate Turkey's position as a pivotal country and as a justification for an active foreign policy.²⁰¹ Furthermore, Davutoğlu speaks about Afro-Eurasia as the mainland of human history while placing Turkey right at its centre and thus defining it as a crucial country and a regional power. In a speech at a meeting discussing regional cooperation, Davutoğlu stressed the need 'to embark on a new vision in order to have the Eurasia region regain its historical importance' and he even claimed that 'if peace and welfare do not reign in Eurasia, it is not possible to make peace and welfare reign in the world, either'.²⁰²

Such strong statements illustrate the geopolitical undercurrents of Davutoğlu's thinking. However, as an academic turned foreign minister, he also has a practical political sense defending the interests of his country when outlining a foreign policy vision. As such, Afro-Eurasia should be considered a pragmatic and cooperative concept aimed at improving Turkey's position in world politics. Economic and trade-related aspects are at the forefront of Davutoğlu's considerations. Contrary to the Russian version of Eurasianism, the Afro-Eurasia concept 'does not seek competition

¹⁹⁸ Davutoğlu 2008: 78

¹⁹⁹ Davutoğlu 2008: 78

²⁰⁰ Erşen 2014a: 188

²⁰¹ Ozkan 2014: 121-125

²⁰² 'Davutoğlu calls for a "Eurasian union"', *Today's Zaman*, 5 February 2010, available at <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/news-200653-102-davutoglu-calls-for-eurasian-union.html>, accessed 3 October 2014. This statement somewhat resembles Mackinder's famous dictum about territorial control and global domination: 'Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland: Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island: Who rules the World-Island commands the World' (Mackinder 1919: 194).

with Western civilization but rather seeks cooperation in every field. It is not a political creation that seeks to impose monolithic uniformity'.²⁰³ Essentially, according to Tüfekçi, 'Davutoğlu's interpretation of Eurasianism has been instrumental: how to reap the maximum benefits by utilizing Turkey's unique properties, located in a unique geopolitical position, and with deep historical connections with Eurasian countries'.²⁰⁴ As Davutoğlu himself stated at the aforementioned meeting about regional cooperation in Eurasia, 'the western and eastern ends of Eurasia should be reconnected' so that 'we can become the power engine of the world's economy'.²⁰⁵ The overall ambition of his vision of Eurasia is thus for Turkey to occupy a central position, both politically as well as economically, in the region.

Nevertheless, despite not seeking competition with other civilisations, Bilgin and Bilgic argue that there is a new element to the geopolitical imagination espoused by Davutoğlu and the AKP, which is that Turkey sees itself 'as the leader of its own civilizational basin' (defined as the former Ottoman territories plus the Turkic countries and peoples of Eurasia), a fact that becomes apparent following the above discussion of the idea of Afro-Eurasia.²⁰⁶ As a result, Davutoğlu explicitly avoids to define Afro-Eurasia in purely ethnic terms but refers to multiple identities and historical and cultural links. He thus expands the hitherto traditional Turkish definition of Eurasia as a region principally inhabited by Turkic peoples to a vast region encompassing also the Middle East and North Africa. Again, this is aimed at increasing Ankara's global political clout by giving 'expression to Turkey in terms of a plurality of identities such as Western, Turkish, Muslim, Kurdish, Eurasian, and secular' with the result that 'Turkey is thus transformed into an overarching roof that accommodates, protects, and assists in the development of all these identities'.²⁰⁷ As such, Davutoğlu's concepts and ideas actually represent a hybrid between Turkish Eurasianism and Neo-Ottomanism by linking the historical experience of Turkey as the centre of the Ottoman Empire with the cultural and linguistic links to the Turkic peoples in Eurasia. As Erşen argues, although Davutoğlu's and the AKP's foreign policy vision is

²⁰³ Tüysüzöğlu 2014: 100

²⁰⁴ Tüfekçi 2012: 109

²⁰⁵ 'Davutoğlu calls for a "Eurasian union"', *Today's Zaman*, 5 February 2010, available at <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/news-200653-102-davutoglu-calls-for-eurasian-union.html>, accessed 3 October 2014.

²⁰⁶ Bilgin and Bilgic 2011: 191

²⁰⁷ Tüysüzöğlu 2014: 102

primarily influenced by the Moslem-world-centred geopolitical tradition, their ‘views about Eurasia have not been entirely free from influence of the Turkic-world-centered tradition’.²⁰⁸ The main reasons behind this were pragmatic and aimed at increasing Turkey’s overall position of power in global politics. Hence, also during Davutoğlu’s tenure as foreign minister, Eurasianism did not become an official ideology in Turkey but it can be argued, as Tüfekçi does, that ‘during the Davutoğlu era, the application of Eurasianism has reached to the highest level within Turkey’.²⁰⁹

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the eclectic nature of the concept of Eurasia in its Russian and Turkish context. In so doing, it lays the foundation for the subsequent discourse analysis of a more specific aspect, namely the place and importance of Eurasia in Russian and Turkish governing elite’s foreign policy discourse. It has been argued that Eurasia emerged as an exciting new object of study following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which freed up the interpretative space for new discussions about the meaning of Eurasia. In both Russia and Turkey, this opportunity was seized by ideologues and politicians alike and Eurasia (re)entered the realm of political ideas. However, and quite naturally owing to different political realities, there are diverging interpretations of Eurasia in the Russian and Turkish contexts. In Russia, for instance, there is a long philosophical tradition of Eurasianist thought, developed in the early 20th century, which experienced a revival in the post-Soviet period receiving much scholarly and political attention. At the same time, the Russian government implemented the hitherto biggest regional integration project in Eurasia with the idea of fostering a new greater Eurasian area. In Turkey, a similar philosophical tradition is absent, but there has been a discussion of Turkey’s Eurasian identity ever since the 1990s which experienced significant shifts over the years. In addition, in both countries there is also a pragmatic discourse on Eurasia, focusing on national interests, security considerations and economic opportunities.

²⁰⁸ Erşen 2016: 67

²⁰⁹ Tüfekçi 2014: 287

Chapter 5: Eurasia in Russian discourse

This chapter examines the place of Eurasia in Russian government discourse. It is structured along two axes: a topical description focusing on the main themes covered in the discourses followed by a chronological description of the evolution of the discourse. Russia's governing elite's discourse on Eurasia is characterised by an emphasis on various and interlinked themes, most notably geographical, historical and politico-economical aspects. In general, Eurasia is a crucial concept in contemporary Russian foreign policy. Putin outlined as much in his inauguration speech as president in 2012:

These coming years will be crucial for shaping Russia's future in the decades to come. We must all understand that the life of our future generations and our prospects as a country and nation depend on [...] our ability to become a leader and centre of gravity for the whole of Eurasia.¹

The geopolitical concept of Eurasia thus is a central element in Russian foreign policy and in the elite discourse. At the core of this discourse are geographical images, Russia's geographical location as well as the country's size which place Russia right at the centre of Eurasia. The country's centrality in the Eurasian geography serves as foundation for Russia's position as a great power in global affairs and its political development. This geographical focus is coupled with a strong emphasis on Russia's historical experience, namely the role Russia played as the imperial centre of subsequent regional and global empires, and its implications to the present day. Indeed, Eurasia is the region in which Russia's imperial past is grounded and the links which had been created between countries in this space are an important element in Russian foreign policy. As such, frequent references to the existence of a historic community in Eurasia illustrate the importance of this region for Russia's development. Eurasia thus is an important part of Russia's identity. Lastly, the economy and economic integration in Eurasia are a crucial component of Russian government elite discourse in the sense that Eurasia occupies an important place as a synonym for regional integration. With the implementation of the Eurasian Economic Union, with Russia as its principal promoter, Eurasia developed into an independent region in global affairs.

¹ Putin 2012b

Given Russia's dominant position in this setting and its role as a driving force behind Eurasian integration, its position as an important and influential global actor are secured.

This chapter has two aims: it analyses the discourse of Russia's governing elite with regard to the geopolitical concept of Eurasia and it traces the evolution of the importance of this concept in Russian foreign policy over the period under study (2000-2015). Although Eurasia was a constant element in Russian government discourse, it developed into the central element following Putin's return to the presidency in 2012. In the early 2000s, Russian discourse strongly focused on the country's European roots and the development of a partnership with Western countries. The Eurasian location was important in that it characterised Russia as belonging both to the West and the East and offered economic opportunities in both directions. In this context, a slight turn to Asia during the Medvedev presidency, which was also infused by disappointments caused by a fraught relationship between Russia and the West, became apparent. Nonetheless, Eurasia remained a central element in government discourse and took centre stage with the start of Putin's third term as president. The project of establishing the Eurasian (Economic) Union was declared a key foreign policy goal and in the context of the Ukraine crisis and the subsequent confrontation between Russia and the West, Eurasia became even more important. Russian government officials continuously emphasised the importance of a multipolar world order and Eurasia was positioned as one of the poles in this order. Similarly, Russia's position as a great power was strengthened due to its central location in Eurasia and as the main driving force behind Eurasian integration. Hence, Eurasia has a crucial meaning for Russian foreign policy and Russia's political development.

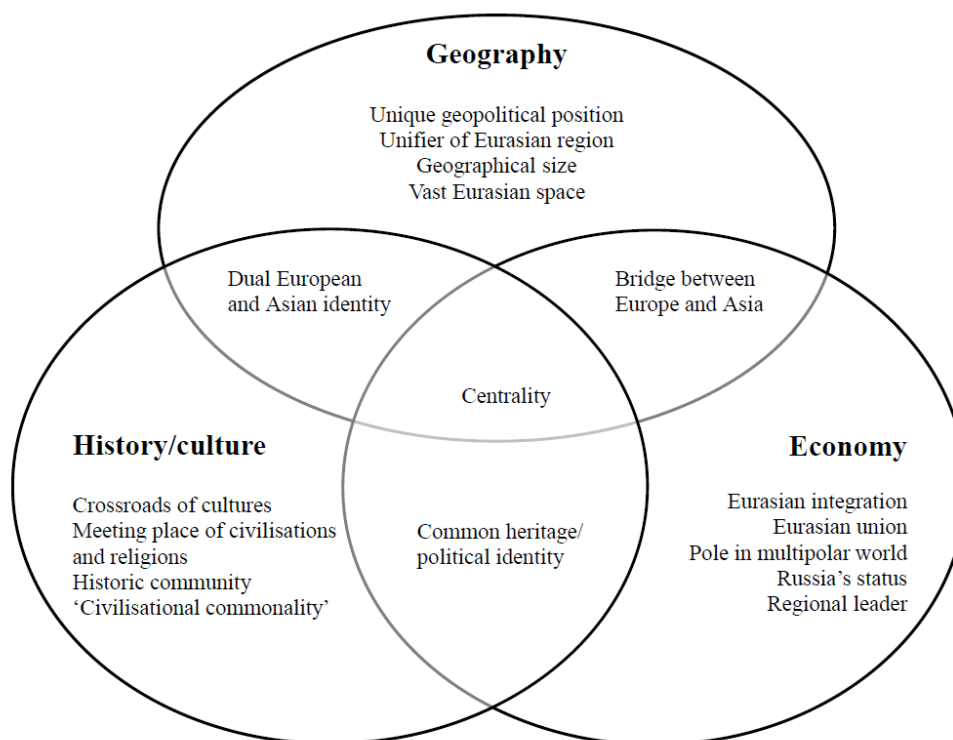
This thesis focuses on the importance of 'space' and the geographical situation of a country in the formulation of its foreign policy. It has been argued that it is only through the discursive practices of foreign policy elites that meaning is attached to geopolitical space. This chapter thus analyses the principal themes in Russian foreign policy with regard to Eurasia through an analysis of government elite discourse while studying how the discourse evolved over the years. In so doing, this chapter will identify several characteristics and role perceptions in the geopolitical imagination of Russia's governing elite. This chapter is divided into two parts: the first part focuses

on a thematic description of Russia's Eurasian discourse on the basis of the four main themes – geography, history, culture, economy – covered in the discourses, followed by a second part which discusses the evolution of the discourse in a chronological manner focusing on main events in foreign policy and Russian politics and how they influenced Russian officials' discourse on Eurasia.

5.1 Prevalent themes

This section covers the dominant themes in the Russian government officials' discourses on Eurasia. As described in Chapter 2, these themes were determined by reading a sample of discourses from Russian officials thereby identifying the principal themes and keywords with regard to geographical and geopolitical assumptions in Russian discourse and national identity conceptions. Four broad categories – geography, history, culture, and economy – were identified and each category comprises several keywords which cover the basic conceptions of and references to Eurasia in Russian discourse (see *Figure 2.2*). For the subsequent discussion in this section, they are grouped into three overarching and rather general themes. In a first part, I will discuss the importance of geography in Russian officials' discourse on Eurasia before moving on to the second category which groups together historical and cultural aspects of the discourse. In a third part, the discussion focuses on the economy and the issue of regional integration as a dominant aspect in Russia's Eurasian discourse. Each section will take a close look at the main issues within each theme and work with direct quotes taken from the Russian officials' discourses. The main aspects and keywords of each theme and the way in which they overlap are schematically represented in *Figure 5.1* below.

Figure 5.1 Main themes in Russia's Eurasian discourse



5.1.1 Geography

This analysis starts with the year 2000, following Vladimir Putin's election as president of Russia. The official foreign policy concept, approved by Putin in 2000, sets the framework for Russian foreign policy. The principal theme in Russian elite discourse with regard to Eurasia is geography, or more precisely, Russia's geographical location on both the European and Asian continents. In general, geography, or more specifically Russia's geographical location, and the perception in Moscow of Russia's place in the world, has a major impact on the formulation and conduct of Russian foreign policy. As Foreign Minister Lavrov argues in an article published in 2013 in the Russian *International Affairs* magazine, 'the independence of Russian foreign policy is conditioned by its geographical sizes, unique geopolitical position, centuries-old historical tradition, culture and self-consciousness of our people'.² Similarly, President Putin stated that one of the reasons why Russia has an active foreign policy with global reach is the country's geographical situation. In a speech to Russian diplomats, Putin raises the question, 'does Russian foreign policy remain global in terms of its coverage?' and then proceeds to answer it himself in the

² Lavrov 2013

affirmative by stating the reason therefore as being ‘not only because of our military or economic potential, but also because of geography. We are present in Europe, in Asia, in the North and in the South. Of course we have interests there. It can’t be otherwise’.³ In an article discussing Russia’s geographical metanarratives, Laruelle argues that the country’s size is an indispensable part of Russia’s self-perception as a meaningful and powerful state in global affairs. Therefore, ‘the destiny of the country is linked to its geographic scope’ which essentially means that Russia, given its size, can only exist as a great power.⁴ This argument is illustrated by a quote from President Putin, taken from a speech at a Russian Geographical Society meeting in 2009, where he argued that ‘when we say great, a great country, a great state – certainly, size matters. [...] When there is no size, there is no influence, no meaning’.⁵ Hence, Russia’s geographical location in addition to the country’s size are critical foundations for Russian foreign policy.

Due to the vast expanse of Russia, the governing elite describes their country as belonging to various geographical regions. In an interview with Chinese media outlets, for instance, Putin said that ‘we know that Russia is both a European and an Asian country’ as well as ‘Russia is a large and complex country located both in Asia and Europe’.⁶ Similarly, in a discussion about Russian trade partners, Medvedev reminded a US media outlet that ‘Russia is both a European and an Asian country’.⁷ What is more, Russia’s identity is described by the governing elite as not just European and Asian, but as Eurasian. The classical argument in Russian discourse is that Russia is Eurasian due to its geography, as this quote from an interview Putin gave to Polish media illustrates: ‘From the geographical point of view Russia is of course a Eurasian country’.⁸

According to the Russian government view, Russia’s geographical location on both the European and Asian continents also predetermines what sort of foreign policy Russia should conduct. This is recognised in the foreign policy concepts of 2000 and

³ Putin 2002b

⁴ Laruelle 2012: 557

⁵ Quoted in Laruelle 2012: 557

⁶ Putin 2000

⁷ Medvedev 2014

⁸ Putin 2002a

2008. There it is written that ‘the geopolitical position of Russia as the largest Eurasian power’ as well as ‘its status as one of the leading States of the world and a permanent member of the UN Security Council’ determines the need for Russia to have a balanced and multi-vector foreign policy.⁹ Interestingly, this same statement was removed from the revised 2013 foreign policy concept. However, at the same time, the new foreign policy concept makes reference to the existence of three separate spaces, Eurasia, the Euro-Atlantic and the Asia-Pacific, and the need to safeguard these space’s ‘indivisible security’ in order to counter global destabilisation. In addition, the concept refers to Russia’s traditional identity by stating that the country’s foreign policy ‘reflects the unique role our country has been playing over centuries as a counterbalance in international affairs and the development of global civilization’.¹⁰ As will be discussed in more detail below, over the three Putin presidencies, Russia’s Eurasian discourse has gradually shifted and become a central component of foreign policy. In 2011, Putin proposed the establishment of a Eurasian (Economic) Union (EAEU), which was mentioned prominently as one of the principal priorities in the 2013 foreign policy concept. Therefore, the direct reference to Russia’s Eurasian geopolitical position is less important, because it is anyway assumed to be a main characteristic of Russia’s identity.

In general, Russia’s geographical location in Eurasia and as the principal Eurasian power, is an important factor influencing foreign policy. Members of Russia’s government insist on the open and multi-vector character of Russian foreign policy which is due to a geographical location at the intersection of regions and continents. This of course is also rooted in an opportunistic logic in that Russia wants to keep all options open, as Putin explained to an assembly of Russian diplomats and ambassadors back in 2001:

it would be wrong to measure whether we have more priorities in Europe or in Asia. We cannot afford either a Western or an Eastern tilt. The reality is that a power which occupies such a geopolitical position as Russia has national interests everywhere.¹¹

⁹ Russian Federation 2000; Russian Federation 2008

¹⁰ Russian Federation 2013

¹¹ Putin 2001; See also Putin 2003b: ‘Russia, as is well known, is geographically located in both Europe and Asia, so we, of course, have interests in both parts of the world’.

What is more, Russia's geopolitical position as Eurasian power also bestows upon it a special role. According to Putin, 'Russia, as a unique Eurasian power, has always played a special role in building relations between the East and the West'.¹² Uniting both European and Asian characteristics is considered an advantage for Russia because it represents an added value to its role in global affairs. Sergey Ivanov shared this assessment in introducing his speech at the 2001 Munich Security Conference with the following words: 'We base our analysis on the postulate of the Eurasian location of Russia, its role of a natural bridge between Europe and Asia, between two civilizations, the role Russia has been playing for more than one century.'¹³ What is interesting here is that Russia's role as a bridge is not just due to its geography, but it is also historically rooted. Hence the geographical and historical arguments come together in emphasising the particularity and importance of Russia's Eurasian location.

This is also underlined when looking back at the consequence of the collapse of the Soviet Union which presented Russia with a new geographical situation after having lost what previously was part of the Russian and Soviet empires. As a result, Russia was now simultaneously further away from Asia and from Europe and therefore a new Eurasian discourse or a sense of Russia being a Eurasian power emerged. In this context, Russia was trying to find ways to formulate a comprehensive foreign policy which would encompass both its European identity and its Asian vector. Indeed, as Kerr argued, Russian foreign policy in its formative period in the 1990s was strongly influenced by 'the country's spatial dimensions and its changed geopolitical position, in relation to Europe and Asia, or, as it is increasingly expressed, as a Eurasian power'.¹⁴ With this in mind, the geographical aspects of the Eurasia discourse of Russia's governing elite, such as portraying Russia as belonging to both Europe and Asia as well as being a bridge between the two, appears only logical. The same applies to the more recent discourse on Eurasian integration which describes the EAEU as an 'efficient bridge between Europe and the dynamic Asia-Pacific region'.¹⁵ Because Russia had to redefine its national and geographical identity in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse and make good for the loss of its former imperial lands, it was important for Russian policy-makers to be able to refer to Russia's geographical

¹² Putin 2003c

¹³ S. Ivanov 2001

¹⁴ Kerr 1995: 978

¹⁵ Putin 2011

expanse and link to many regions in order to maintain the country's special status and powerful position in global affairs.

However, the composition of Russia's Eurasian identity is more complex than this. Regarding Russia's European identity, we see that geography is one aspect, but culture is a different one. There are several statements emphasising Russia's Eurasian geography while insisting on the fact that, from a cultural point of view, Russia is European. Early on in his first presidential term, Vladimir Putin made this point very clearly in an interview with Polish media outlets: 'Russia is without any doubt a European country because it has a European culture. There can be no doubt about it. It has always been that way'.¹⁶ Sergey Ivanov, speaking at the Munich Security Conference in 2001, also left no doubt about Russia's European roots when stating that the 'composition of its population, spirit, culture and prevailing religions make Russia a European country'.¹⁷

In general, Russia's identity as a European state is not really questioned by either the Russian elite nor most European countries. Russia's belonging to the historical and geographical European community is frequently stated as a fact by Russia's political leaders. Before the East-West confrontation that characterized the Cold War, Russia, in its form as Russian empire, was a part of Europe and the European concert of powers. According to Putin, this did not change in the meantime, as he made clear when addressing the Russian Federal Assembly in 2005: 'Above all else Russia was, is and will, of course, be a major European power'.¹⁸ Historically, Europe always was the reference point for Russian development and thus the debate is not so much about whether Russia belongs to Europe or not. Indeed, according to Neumann, 'the idea of Europe is the main "Other" in relation to which the idea of Russia is defined'.¹⁹ Similarly, the idea of a Greater Europe, which was advanced by different Russian presidents, aims to establish Russia as an important member of this space.²⁰ These ideas provide Russia with a new discourse in terms of its European identity and Russia can maintain its European identity while re-defining what it means to be European.

¹⁶ Putin 2002b

¹⁷ S. Ivanov 2001

¹⁸ Putin 2005

¹⁹ Neumann 1996: 1; see also Neumann 2016.

²⁰ Menkiszak 2013

Coming back to the elite's Eurasian discourse, it is no coincidence that Russian officials highlight their country's European roots and civilisational belonging to Europe and the Euro-Atlantic space. There is also no contradiction between such discourses and Russia's emphasis on its Eurasian nature since the two are actually linked. According to a Russian academic, 'Eurasia is part of Russia's general vision of Wider Europe', which includes both the Euro-Atlantic community based on NATO and the EU as well as the Eurasian community based on the EAEU and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO).²¹ It is therefore only logical that Russian officials would insist on their country's European identity. In the 2013 foreign policy concept then there is no room for ambiguity and Russia is characterised as having 'deep-rooted civilizational ties' with the Euro-Atlantic states in addition to a common geography, history and economic ties.²² The discourse however becomes more blurred in the context of the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union. In one of his pre-election articles published in 2012, Vladimir Putin stated that 'Russia is an inalienable and organic part of Greater Europe and European civilization. Our citizens think of themselves as Europeans. We are by no means indifferent to developments in united Europe'.²³ Therefore, Putin continues to argue:

Russia proposes moving towards the creation of a common economic and human space from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean – a community referred by Russian experts to as “the Union of Europe”, which will strengthen Russia's potential and position in its economic pivot toward the “new Asia”.²⁴

In this article, Putin thus essentially promotes the same vision he already outlined with regard to the planned Eurasian Union, which should equally serve as a link between Europe and the dynamic Asia-Pacific region. Hence, in the context of Russia's Eurasian discourse, Europe is characterised in an instrumental manner as an important element in Russia's plans to integrate the wider Eurasian region. This becomes apparent in both the security and economic realms with Medvedev's proposal for the establishment of a pan-European security treaty in 2008 (see Chapter 3) and then

²¹ Interview with academic, Moscow, 3 June 2015

²² Russian Federation 2013

²³ Putin 2012a

²⁴ Putin 2012a

Putin's plan to build a Eurasian Union (more details below), which both promote the image of Russia as uniting the Eurasian region.

Russia's European identity is frequently mentioned and an integral part of the discourse of Russian officials. The same goes for Russia's Asian identity, although contrary to other European countries' acceptance of Russia as a European country, other countries from Asia perceive Russia differently. Whereas it is clear that from a geographical point of view, Russia is part of Asia, Salin argues that 'it is absolutely certain, however, that from a civilizational point of view Russia is not an Asian country, especially when viewed by Asia-Pacific nations'.²⁵ Nevertheless, this has not refrained Russian officials from stating Russia's belonging to the Asia-Pacific region and indeed over the years Russia's Asian orientation has become more important. Suffice to come back to the above speech by Sergey Ivanov at the Munich Security Conference in 2001, where he stated that Russia is a European country but that 'two thirds of [Russia's] territory and the main part of economic potential are situated in Asia'. As a result, Russia has interests in both regions, which for Ivanov is illustrated by the official 'symbols of the Russian Federation [which] include the double-headed Eagle looking to the West and to the East'.²⁶ Especially in the context of the so-called rise of the East and the shift in economic power to Asia, Russia's leaders attempted to integrate and position their country more closely within this region. The organisation of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Vladivostok in 2012, for instance, was seen as a major step in Russia's attempts at intensifying relations with Asia and promoting its pivot to the East. Hence, the 2013 foreign policy concept already places Russia at the centre of the region by stating that 'strengthening Russia's presence in the Asia-Pacific region is becoming increasingly important since Russia is an integral part of this fastest-developing geopolitical zone'.²⁷

Russia's leaders use the Eurasian location and identity as a justification for Russia's interests and involvement in the Asia-Pacific region. During his term as president, Dmitry Medvedev presented the participants of the Valdai Discussion Club meeting in 2008 with the following assessment:

²⁵ Salin 2012

²⁶ S. Ivanov 2001

²⁷ Russian Federation 2013

We frequently call Russia a Eurasian country, not thinking about the practical implications of such a term. In any case, perhaps we don't take this fully into account when we talk about making a given decision. But in fact Russia is indeed a state one part of which is drawn towards Europe, yet an important part of Russia is located in Asia. Of course Russia has a large number of ties with its Asian partners.²⁸

Other Russian officials also argue along this line. Former Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, for instance, in a speech at a session of the ASEAN regional council, stated that 'Russia as a Eurasian state is a direct and keen participant of all the processes occurring in the [Asia-Pacific] region'.²⁹ Or, as Putin reiterated in 2014, 'For Russia, as a Eurasian country, it is natural to be highly interested in the Asia-Pacific region. It is both a huge market and an important source of growth for Russia's Far East and Eastern Siberia'.³⁰ Hence, the geopolitical location is important with regard to Russia's identity as a Eurasian power but also regarding opportunities for economic development and the importance of maintaining a multi-vector foreign policy.

In general, as the statement by Medvedev illustrates, references to Russia's European identity and to its Asian identity somewhat differ. While Russia's leaders always emphasise Russia's dual identity as both European and Asian, the roots of this identity and also especially the implications differ. The following statement from Putin in a meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club in 2007 is illustrative of this difference:

Russia is a unique country in that part of its territory is in Asia and a large part is in Europe. Christian values form the foundation of Russian culture and in this sense Russia is a European country. But Russia is also home to 15 million Muslims, a large part of our territory is in Asia, and we also have interests in Asia.³¹

Indeed, when taking a closer look, one can see that there is a difference in the way in which government officials see Russia's European and Asian identities. As such, Russia is both European and Asian. While the European component grounds in culture, history and the cultural foundation of Russia as a European country, the Asian part is

²⁸ Medvedev 2008c

²⁹ I. Ivanov 2002

³⁰ Putin 2014a

³¹ Putin 2007b

more a function of Russia's geography, which links it to Asia, and with regard to the potential of the Asian vector for Russia's economic development.

In general, Russia considers itself to be part of the three geopolitical spaces Eurasia, Euro-Atlantic and Asia-Pacific, if only by nature of its size and geographical location.³² However, among these, the Eurasian space occupies a special position because it also connects the other two spaces. Indeed, there are different aspects to a geographical reading of Russia's Eurasian identity, from the simple fact that Russia is both European and Asian and thus Eurasian, to the opportunities and foreign policy focus this offers. There is a geographical component in that Russia does indeed consider itself to be at the centre of Eurasia. But there is also a politico-economic component, namely that Russia is the main driving force behind economic development and integration in the region. Crucially, however, all this is linked to Russia's 'survival', in the sense that Eurasia, and Russia's Eurasian location for that matter, becomes the most important scene for Russia's political and economic development. It is also here where Russia's ambition and self-understanding as a great global power is grounded.

5.1.2 History/Culture

History matters for Russia. As Bobo Lo argues, history fulfils several roles in Russian foreign policy, one of which is as the 'basis for national pride and assertiveness', which is primarily grounded in Russia's successful military history (especially with reference to Russia's victory in World War II or, how Russians prefer to call it, the 'Great Patriotic War') and underpins Russia's claim for great power status.³³ As such, Russia's particular position in global affairs today as a major power with a certain status is a legacy of former times (such as Russia being a member of the UN Security Council, having inherited the Soviet seat). Russia's existence is strongly linked to past experiences and Moscow's role as the imperial centre of subsequent regional and global empires for many centuries. This left an imprint on future generations of Russia's elite and their attempts to define Russia's role and identity in international politics.³⁴ Indeed, as Clunan argues, in the efforts to re-define Russia's national

³² Svarin 2016

³³ Lo 2015: 18-22

³⁴ For a comprehensive study of the impact of history on Russian foreign policy, see Legvold 2007.

identity after the collapse of the Soviet Union, ‘historical memories of Russia’s prior self [...] served as the primary source’.³⁵ The importance of Russia’s historical experience can also be observed in some of the actions of President Putin and the use of symbols of the past for the official state emblem, the old Soviet melody for the new national anthem and the change of certain national holidays.³⁶ The 2013 foreign policy concept, for instance, makes reference to Russia’s past and its importance for contemporary Russian foreign policy by postulating that Russian foreign policy ‘is consistent and continuous and reflects the unique role our country has been playing over centuries as a counterbalance in international affairs and the development of global civilization’.³⁷

Putin was candid in his view about the importance of history for Russia. In his first address to the Federal Assembly of his third presidential term in December 2012, Putin claimed that Russia’s thousand-year long history has a strong influence on the contemporary development of Russia’s identity and that it is one of the foundations of Russian power and strength:

In order to revive national consciousness, we need to link historical eras and get back to understanding the simple truth that Russia did not begin in 1917, or even in 1991, but rather, that we have a common, continuous history spanning over one thousand years, and we must rely on it to find inner strength and purpose in our national development.³⁸

Likewise, in his 2003 address to the Federal Assembly, Putin argues that this history conditions the character of Russia’s statehood in that it leaves no other option than for Russia to be a strong state and power: ‘Our entire historical experience shows that a country like Russia can live and develop within its existing borders only if it is a strong nation’.³⁹ However, history does not exist in a vacuum, and as the previous and next statement illustrate, it is also closely linked to Russia’s geographical reality and geopolitical position:

³⁵ Clunan 2009: 206

³⁶ Stent 2008: 1091

³⁷ Russian Federation 2013

³⁸ Putin 2012c

³⁹ Putin 2003a

Maintaining a state spread over such a vast territory and preserving a unique community of peoples while keeping up a strong presence on the international stage is not just an immense labour, it is also a task that has cost our people untold victims and sacrifice. Such has been Russia's historic fate over these thousand and more years. Such has been the way Russia has continuously emerged as a strong nation.⁴⁰

Referring to such concepts as human suffering and the efforts provided by the Russian people in building a strong state with a vast territory, this statement illustrates how the historical and geographical arguments in Putin's discourse are closely linked. The common denominator between the two themes is Eurasia, the geography in which Russia's imperial past is grounded. As Medvedev wrote in a newspaper article in 2012, 'we have centuries-long experience at the crossroads of different cultures and civilisations. No wonder Russia is called a Eurasian [...] country'.⁴¹ Within the Eurasian space, a special place is reserved for the other post-Soviet states on the basis of a common historical experience, cultural closeness and, as Lavrov calls it, 'civilizational commonality'.⁴² Russia has emphasised the existence of a historic community in Eurasia which still today links the countries of the former Soviet Union to each other. Vladimir Putin did so in his 2005 presidential address, while making allusion to Russia's imperial past as the main power and economic and cultural centre on the Eurasian continent: 'Russia should continue its civilising mission on the Eurasian continent. This mission consists in ensuring that democratic values, combined with national interests, enrich and strengthen our historic community'.⁴³ According to this reading, there is a historic community of states on the Eurasian continent, referring to the Commonwealth of Independent States countries, where Russia occupies an important position.

This is important in the context of Moscow's promotion of Eurasian integration and the way in which this project is seen by Russia's political elite. In a speech at a CIS forum in 2010, Foreign Minister Lavrov underlined the importance of historical, cultural and civilisational links among the CIS countries as well as their influence on new political projects:

⁴⁰ Putin 2003a

⁴¹ Medvedev 2012

⁴² Lavrov 2007b

⁴³ Putin 2005

Our countries share a common geography and a common history. We are united by economic interdependence, cultural and civilizational commonality, and simply the interlacing of millions of human destinies. Therefore, the integration processes within the Commonwealth space derive from real life experiences.⁴⁴

Lavrov then goes on to argue that Russia is not playing geopolitical games and seeking a sphere of influence in this region while accusing others, especially NATO, of doing so. He laments that these actors seek their own advantages while not respecting the interests of the countries in this space to the detriment of regional stability. Lavrov thus paints the image of a natural regional order and depicts the CIS as a homogeneous and closed space comprising several countries with a common history and shared interests. What is more, Lavrov goes on to link the historical to the present and even the future in attaching value to this space for the future development of the region by stating that '[the CIS space] is a common civilizational habitat for all the peoples living here that preserves our historic and spiritual heritage and, I am sure, our common future'.⁴⁵ Although this speech took place before President Putin outlined the Eurasian Union project, it evokes similar themes in highlighting the importance of the existing links between countries in the Eurasian region for the future development of the region. Indeed, when describing the nature of the proposed Eurasian (Economic) Union, Putin made clear that the CIS states were at the centre of this project, which is obvious given that three of them were founding members, and also constituted the principal pool for new member states.⁴⁶ There thus seems to be a direct connection between Russia's discourse on cultural and civilizational ties ('commonality') between the CIS states and Moscow's perception of the EAEU, which it thus sees in a similar light. In a speech at the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy in Moscow in 2014, Lavrov criticised the West for its arrogant attitude towards Eurasian integration even though, according to him, the 'countries intending to join the EAEU have much more in common in terms of their economies, history and culture than many EU members'.⁴⁷ Again we can see how Russian government officials emphasise the notion of a cultural and historical

⁴⁴ Lavrov 2010

⁴⁵ Lavrov 2010

⁴⁶ In his *Izvestia* article, Putin stated that 'the Eurasian Union is an open project. We welcome other partners to it, particularly CIS member states' (Putin 2011).

⁴⁷ Lavrov 2014e

connection between their country and the other post-Soviet countries and how this connection is particularly beneficial for Eurasian integration.

Such feelings are echoed by some members of the analytical community. With reference to the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union, Podberezkin and Podberezkina remark that 'Eurasian ideology recognizes the shared 1,000-year history of Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus and other CIS countries'.⁴⁸ Hence, Russia's history is linked to Eurasia and in turn the political community which emerged there is closely linked to Russia. For instance, the use of the Russian language further proves this fact since it is characterised as the language which has allowed the region to develop: 'For centuries, [Russian] has been the language of interethnic communication for the numerous ethnic groups of the Eurasian continent'.⁴⁹ Such statements cement the linking up of the geographical and historical arguments which is a crucial theme in defining Russia's Eurasian identity.

A further notion in this geography-history nexus is the idea that Russia plays the role of bridge between East and West, both geographically but also with regard to bridging civilisational divides. For instance, in a speech at the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) summit in Malaysia in 2003, Putin stated that 'Russia, as a unique Eurasian power, has always played a special role in building relations between the East and the West'.⁵⁰ According to Putin, the fact that Russia unites both European and Asian civilisations on its territory, makes it the perfect place for a dialogue of civilisations: 'Russia, as a Eurasian country, is a unique example where the dialogue of cultural civilisations has become a centuries-old tradition of state and public life'.⁵¹ Putin made this statement during a meeting of the Presidential Council for Culture and Art, where he furthermore insisted that the historical existence of many different peoples and cultures in Russia is a great strength of the country. Eurasia thus is an important characteristic of Russia's identity and its historical roots influence contemporary foreign policy. Sergey Ivanov highlighted this fact in his speech at the 2001 Munich Security Conference: 'We base our analysis on the postulate of the Eurasian location of Russia, its role of a natural bridge between Europe and Asia,

⁴⁸ Podberezkin and Podberezkina 2015: 49

⁴⁹ Putin 2015c

⁵⁰ Putin 2003c

⁵¹ Putin 2003d

between two civilizations, the role Russia has been playing for more than one century'.⁵²

Although this is a recurrent theme in Russian discourse, it was taken up again especially in the context of the establishment of the Eurasian (Economic) Union. President Putin insisted that this union would serve as an important pole in global development while also connecting the two other poles by 'serving as an efficient bridge between Europe and the dynamic Asia-Pacific region'.⁵³ Similarly, Medvedev called Russia a connecting link between Europe and Asia in an article published in 2012 ahead of a summit of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), thus emphasising Russia's position, both geographically as well as culturally, between Europe and Asia.⁵⁴ Medvedev stated that in joining ASEM in 2010, not only Russia, but the entire world would benefit because Russia would be able to connect the two most influential poles in global affairs. He went on to argue that Russia was particularly well-situated to do so because of its 'centuries-long experience at the crossroads of different cultures and civilisations' as a Eurasian country. According to Medvedev, the country's Eurasian identity should be seen as 'a major asset in developing cultural dialogue between regions and continents and also in building a common economic space from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific'.⁵⁵ Russian discourse thus mixes geographical elements with cultural and civilisational references in order to emphasise Russia's centrality in Eurasia and describes it as a major advantage for the country but also for the international system more generally. The nature of the Russian state as a multi-ethnic entity uniting many cultures and peoples, which had been forged over centuries of state-building, is linked to Russia's Eurasian position and identity. This in turn allows the government elite to position their country as an important actor in fostering dialogue and acting as a bridge between the different poles of a multipolar world in the making.

⁵² S. Ivanov 2001

⁵³ Putin 2011

⁵⁴ The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is an intergovernmental process and meeting format comprising 53 countries from Europe and Asia as well as the EU commission and ASEAN secretariat with the aim to serve as a dialogue platform and to promote further cooperation between Europe and Asia.

⁵⁵ Medvedev 2012

5.1.3 Economy

In addition to geography and history, the other big theme in the discourses of Russia's government officials on Eurasia is the economy and more specifically, economic integration in Eurasia. In the early 2000s, when speaking about Eurasia, but also in Russian foreign policy in general, the Commonwealth of Independent States, or Russia's neighbours are frequently mentioned as a priority. It is made clear that the CIS is an important actor in Eurasia because it contributes to stability and economic development of the region:

The Commonwealth is an organisation on an international scale. And it is well capable not only of projecting influence, but assuming the responsibility for the solution of a wide range of issues in a huge region. They include security, economic and humanitarian cooperation in Eurasia.⁵⁶

Sergey Ivanov, when speaking at the Munich Security Conference in 2004, also underlined the importance of the CIS as a stabilising factor in Eurasia when he says that 'good-neighborly relations with the CIS States [...] represent the most important stability and security factor over the vast area of Eurasia'.⁵⁷ However, while the CIS is an important organisation in the Eurasian region, it is not considered to be the only organisation promoting regional cooperation and integration. During the early years of Putin's first presidency, economic integration across the broader Eurasian region, not limited to the CIS, was an important theme in the discourse. Here it also becomes clear that the region of Eurasia is not limited to the geographical expanse of the CIS but extends beyond it. Medvedev, for instance, mentioned the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) when speaking about integration processes in Eurasia: 'Regarding wider integration processes throughout the Eurasian region, a very important role should be given to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization'.⁵⁸ Such statements illustrate the comprehensive nature of Eurasia. While post-Soviet organisations, such as the CIS, are frequently mentioned and characterised as crucial to the development of the Eurasian region, other organisations like the SCO also play an important role. Similarly, Foreign Minister Lavrov underlined the fact that Eurasia is more than the

⁵⁶ Putin 2002b

⁵⁷ S. Ivanov 2004

⁵⁸ Medvedev 2008a

CIS when addressing his colleagues at a meeting of the SCO foreign ministers by calling Eurasia ‘our region’.⁵⁹

Towards the latter years of Putin’s second presidential term, the nature of the international system became a concern with direct repercussions for Russia’s view of Eurasia. Regional integration started to occupy a more prominent place in government discourse. In opposition to what Moscow sees as a unilateral world under US dominance, many statements emphasise Moscow’s wish to establish a regional organisation and to foster regional integration in general. Sergey Lavrov is a particularly strong defender of the idea of regional integration. He speaks about the ‘integration imperatives of globalization’,⁶⁰ which push Russia to find ways to deepen integration with its neighbours in order to remain powerful in the 21st century. For Lavrov, this is important in the context of the ongoing globalisation and regionalisation efforts taking place all over the world. In general, the Russian leadership considers regional integration and regionalism a crucial development in the 21st century international system. Foreign Minister Lavrov left no doubt about Russia’s viewpoint when addressing the UN General Assembly in New York in 2011:

In a polycentric world, an effective international architecture can be created only if it rests upon regional “building blocks”. The enhancement of the regional level of global governance and the increasing role of regional organizations are an integral part of the modern international relations.⁶¹

This is in line with Russia’s vision of the global system as being characterised by multipolarity. As Lavrov argued, ‘we see ourselves and really are one of the centers of the new polycentric world. This status of Russia is determined by its military, geographical, economic opportunities, its culture and human potential’.⁶² For Russia, the quest for a multipolar (or to use Russia’s preferred term, polycentric) world order is a key principle of its foreign policy and at the same time a clear message of opposition against a US dominated unipolar order.⁶³ As Russian analyst Lukyanov argued, Russia changed its foreign policy approach towards the end of Putin’s first

⁵⁹ Lavrov 2007a

⁶⁰ Lavrov 2008

⁶¹ Lavrov 2011a

⁶² Lavrov 2012

⁶³ Silviu 2016

presidency and the beginning of the Medvedev presidency, from wanting to integrate within Western institutions to a belief that the new multipolar system was one of realpolitik and defence of national interests. As a result, 'Moscow is now convinced that the future world order will be based on competitive interactions of principal centers of power and not on any one power's domination. With this belief in future power structures, Russia has limited its immediate interests to Eurasia'.⁶⁴

In this context, Eurasia occupies an important place as a synonym for regional integration. The underlying reasoning is that because the 21st century is multipolar, every country needs to cooperate with others and regional organisations are instrumental in this regard. This in turn, and especially in the case of Russian efforts to integrate the Eurasian region, is also a guarantee for Russia to continue to occupy an important position as a great power. Hence, Russian domination of Eurasia is an important component of Moscow's foreign policy strategy which seeks to promote an image of Russia as a global great power. Indeed, as Lo argues, 'in the case of Russia, its enduring influence in post-Soviet Eurasia substantiates its claim to be a truly independent center of global power'.⁶⁵ Integration with its neighbours and Eurasian integration more generally, are thus important for Russia as Medvedev indicated in his 2010 presidential address to the Russian Federal Assembly, saying that 'we need to work towards creating a common economic space that would stretch from the Arctic to the Pacific, all across Eurasia'.⁶⁶ Eurasian integration is thus seen as a crucial development taking place in the context of globalization and therefore something Russia cannot neglect.

In 2011 it was Putin, then still the Prime Minister, who set out the principal goal for Russian foreign policy in the 21st century in an article in the *Izvestia* newspaper, namely economic integration with its neighbours and the formation of the Eurasian Union.⁶⁷ In the context of what Russia's leaders see as one of the principal developments in the international system, the growth of regional integration mechanisms, Putin outlined his vision of the Eurasian Union as 'a powerful

⁶⁴ Lukyanov 2010: 28

⁶⁵ Lo 2015: 44

⁶⁶ Medvedev 2010

⁶⁷ Putin 2011

supranational association capable of becoming one of the poles in the modern world'.⁶⁸ Economic integration and the formation of a common market in Eurasia are thus key, as Putin said at another occasion: 'A powerful centre of economic development that attracts business and investors, a common market is being formed in Eurasia'.⁶⁹ Although the idea of setting up a Eurasian Union is not new (Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev made a similar proposal in 1994), Putin's proposal provided new impetus to further develop the existing integration mechanisms among the post-Soviet states. Shortly after the publication of Putin's article, the three presidents of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia signed a declaration to further deepen Eurasian integration in November 2011. Russia had already formed a Customs Union with its neighbouring states Belarus and Kazakhstan in 2010, which was further developed into a Single Economic Space in 2012, establishing a single market with the traditional four freedoms of movement of labour, goods, services and capital. These agreements and their rules and regulations, which represent some of the most serious and concrete integration mechanisms in the post-Soviet space, provided the foundation for the proposed Eurasian Union project.⁷⁰ As a result of these developments, the Eurasian Economic Commission was established in the beginning of 2012 to regulate interactions in the single space, before eventually becoming the principal regulatory body of the newly established Eurasian Economic Union. The latter materialised when Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan signed the respective agreement on 29 May 2014. In October and December 2014, respectively, further agreements on the accession of Armenia and Kyrgyzstan were signed. Finally, the Eurasian Economic Union came into effect on 1 January 2015.

While in theory, and according to Putin's original idea, the Eurasian Union project is open to any country who wishes to join, it is predominantly an affair of post-Soviet states. In a speech at the 2014 St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, President Putin said: 'Russia and its neighbours are implementing a large-scale Eurasian integration project'.⁷¹ However, Putin also stated that the Eurasian Union should become a bridge between Europe and Asia, similar to the position Russia, with its

⁶⁸ Putin 2011

⁶⁹ Putin 2014b

⁷⁰ Dragneva and Wolczuk 2014

⁷¹ Putin 2014a

Eurasian geopolitical location, already occupied in earlier years.⁷² It thus becomes clear that Eurasia is a region which is closely linked to Russia and that Russia is the driving force behind integration in the region. Foreign Minister Lavrov emphasised this notion in a speech at an international conference in Moscow: ‘We see ourselves as the country that has consistently deepened the integration ties with its neighbors. Of course, first we are talking about Eurasian integration’.⁷³ The reasoning behind such statements is not rooted in historical or cultural arguments but in contemporary political considerations and in the idea of maintaining Russia’s role as an important power in global affairs. Nevertheless, Vladimir Putin insisted that the link between Russia and Eurasia was not only very strong but also unique. One of the most illustrative statements can be found in Putin’s 2005 presidential address to the Federal Assembly, where he stated that ‘Russia should continue its civilising mission on the Eurasian continent. This mission consists in ensuring that democratic values, combined with national interests, enrich and strengthen our historic community’.⁷⁴ This statement was only put into action several years later by Russia, with first the proposal of the Eurasian Union and the eventual establishment of the EAEU in January 2015.

As we have seen before, Eurasia now stands as an independent region in global affairs and the Eurasian Economic Union also serves the purpose to foster good relations and cooperation with other regions. In this context, Putin also aimed for the Eurasian Union to be an ‘efficient bridge between Europe and the dynamic Asia-Pacific region’.⁷⁵ Or as Lavrov put it in an interview with the Interfax news agency, the integration efforts in the context of the EAEU ‘offer new vistas for fruitful cooperation over the vast Eurasian territory, including with our Asian-Pacific partners’.⁷⁶ While the name of the union obviously links it to Eurasia, it is also supposed to act as a bridge between Europe and Asia: ‘The new union that is being formed on the basis of universal integration principles is designed to serve as an effective link between Europe and the

⁷² It is interesting to note, that Putin wants the Eurasian Union to be both a ‘pole’ in global politics, as well as a ‘link’ between regions. As Sakwa argues, there is an inherent incompatibility between these two concepts: ‘The identity of the new ‘pole’ [...] is unclear, torn between constituting “one of the poles of the world we live in” and “a link between Europe and [...] the Asian-Pacific region”; by definition, a link cannot at the same time be a pole’ (Sakwa 2015a: 24).

⁷³ Lavrov 2012

⁷⁴ Putin 2005

⁷⁵ Putin 2011

⁷⁶ Lavrov 2015c

Asia-Pacific region'.⁷⁷ In 2015, Lavrov reiterated the importance of Eurasian integration and the idea that the EAEU should serve as a bridge between European and Asia-Pacific integration structures: 'Further promotion of Eurasian integration is our absolute priority. [...] We believe that our union has every chance of becoming a bridge between the integration structures of Europe and the Asia-Pacific Region'.⁷⁸ According to one of the interviewees, the EAEU's function as a link also serves a second goal, namely that 'Eurasian integration is important in the context of Russia's relations with Europe and Asia and its position between the two as a safeguard against direct links between Europe and Asia that exclude Russia'.⁷⁹ Russia's position at the centre of Eurasia thus guarantees it an important position also globally as an influential and non-negligible player.

In so doing, it is implied that Eurasia is distinct from Europe and Asia and therefore merits its own integration mechanism. Although in other statements, Putin called upon Europe and especially the EU to cooperate with the Eurasian Union, it is quite clear that in the end the role of the Eurasian Union is to act as a connector between East and West and thus contribute to the maintenance of a unique identity for Eurasian countries. Similarly, the official foreign policy concept, which was signed into effect by Putin in 2013, speaks of the Eurasian Union as serving as an 'effective link' between Europe and Asia-Pacific.⁸⁰ In the instances when the speakers make reference to the 'vast Eurasian region', it is always in conjunction with countries that are not considered to be Russia's immediate neighbours or with organisations that have a reach and member base extending beyond the CIS. We can thus extrapolate that for Russia's governing elite, their country is at the core of Eurasia. Similarly, the Eurasian Union functions as the institutionalized embodiment of Russia's Eurasian identity. The bridge metaphor is an interesting one in that it illustrates the evolution of Russian thinking and discourse on Eurasia. The above discussion on the geographical theme has shown that, at first, it was Russia itself serving as a bridge or link between Europe and the Asia-Pacific region. With the establishment of the Eurasian Union, Russia gave up this role and conferred it upon the new integration structure. Russia is not only the driving force behind the new Eurasian Union, it thus also is at its very centre, using

⁷⁷ Russian Federation 2013

⁷⁸ Lavrov 2015a

⁷⁹ Interview with academic, Moscow, 1 June 2015

⁸⁰ Russian Federation 2013

similar language in characterising first its own position and then the position of the Eurasian Union.

5.1.3.1 Political and normative aspects of economic integration

With the official implementation of the EAEU in January 2015, Eurasian integration finally became a political and economic reality beyond being an important and recurrent theme in the elite's discourse. As Lavrov said in an interview with the newly established *Rossiia Segodnya* news agency in December 2014, 'Eurasian economic integration has become part of our life'.⁸¹ Interestingly, in a short time span, the project already reached a new dimension. The main idea behind the Eurasian Union was economic integration and the formation of a common economic space and customs union in Eurasia. Free movement of people, goods, capital and services – along the idea of the European Union – and generally stronger economic development was to be the main benefit for members of the Eurasian Union.

Another goal behind the Eurasian integration mechanism is the economic development of its member-states. It becomes increasingly clear that the EAEU almost stands as a synonym for the Eurasian region at large and vice versa. At the same time, the Eurasian Union is not limited to being a simple regional integration model fostering regional economies but becomes an instrument for Eurasian countries (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and other interested CIS states) to integrate into the global community while being led by Russia in the process.

However, now that it was established, an additional element was added. According to Lavrov, 'The EAEU is committed to preserving the sovereignty and identity of member-states, while taking integration cooperation to a qualitatively new stage of development'.⁸² Hence, the Eurasian Union not only serves as an economic integration mechanism, but it also acts as a guarantor of the member-states' sovereignty. This is further substantiated by Sergey Glazyev, Putin's advisor on Eurasian integration, who stated that:

⁸¹ Lavrov 2014f

⁸² Lavrov 2014f

mutual respect for national sovereignty is what makes the Eurasian integration different from all previous models, including the European, Soviet, and imperial ones. It is based on the philosophy of Eurasianism, whose basic principles were set forth by 20th century Russian thinkers as they pondered over forms of post-Soviet unification of the peoples of the former Russian Empire.⁸³

As this statement illustrates, there are different dimensions to the EAEU and its significance for Russia and its position in global affairs. As Sakwa argues, ‘while Eurasian economic integration may well be a pragmatic and rational response to the economic challenges facing the region, it is also embedded in a profoundly ideological project that by its very essence is antagonistic to the West’.⁸⁴

It thus seems that the values attached to Eurasia and Eurasian integration are linked to preserving the character of the post-Soviet states and guaranteeing them their own model of development. This point is especially emphasised by some Russian intellectuals. Alexander Lukin for instance argues that the establishment of the Eurasian (Economic) Union is a logical development since ‘the culture and values of many former Soviet republics really do differ from what prevails in the West’ and as a result, people in these countries elected leaders which shared some of Putin’s vision and effectively ‘helped Putin succeed in establishing an independent power center in Eurasia’.⁸⁵

Sovereignty and Eurasian identity are the central elements here. Indeed, as the Russian academics Podberezkin and Podberezkina have argued, ‘the originality of Eurasian civilization and the need to preserve and develop it as a guarantee of national and state sovereignty are currently emerging as the informal ideological basis of efforts to promote Eurasian integration’.⁸⁶ President Putin himself emphasised that the EAEU’s mission went beyond economic integration alone, by arguing that the ‘Eurasian Union is a project for maintaining the identity of nations in the historical Eurasian space in a new century and in a new world’.⁸⁷ However, in the same speech, Putin also stressed that ‘Eurasian integration will also be built on the principle of diversity’ and that every

⁸³ Glazyev 2013

⁸⁴ Sakwa 2015a: 17

⁸⁵ Lukin 2014b: 92-93

⁸⁶ Podberezkin and Podberezkina 2015: 47.

⁸⁷ Putin 2013

member state would retain its unique identity.⁸⁸ There is an interesting ambiguity in this statement in that Putin insists on diversity, while at the same time claiming that the countries of the Eurasian Economic Union share a similar identity which they would like to protect through further integration.

Eurasian integration was one of the major ideas in Putin's third term as president and quickly became a foreign policy priority. However, the discourse around this project not only focused on the real economic advantages and the organisation's cooperative nature and function as a bridge between Europe and Asia, as described above, but also on the benefits of the EAEU for Russian foreign policy. More generally, the EAEU was linked to Russia's position in Eurasia (and beyond), as an important global player. In his inauguration speech as president in May 2012, Putin reflected on the nature of the Eurasian integration project and the country's general future trajectory:

These coming years will be crucial for shaping Russia's future in the decades to come. We must all understand that the life of our future generations and our prospects as a country and nation depend on us today and on our real achievements in building a new economy and developing modern living standards [...] on our determination in developing our vast expanses from the Baltic to the Pacific, and on our ability to become a leader and centre of gravity for the whole of Eurasia.⁸⁹

In this statement, it becomes unequivocally clear how Putin sees the country's position in the Eurasian region: as the dominating power and main leader. Such strong statements about Russia's position in Eurasia are quite rare, but they are indicative of the way in which the Russian political elite sees Eurasia. Similarly, the idea of the Eurasian Union can be understood in the same context. Russia is the main driving force behind this project because it considers itself to be the leader of the region. The following statement, which President Putin made at a meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club in 2013, provides an illustrative summary of Russian discourse on Eurasia and the nature and purpose of Eurasian integration:

The 21st century promises to become the century of major changes, the era of the formation of major geopolitical zones, as well as

⁸⁸ Putin 2013

⁸⁹ Putin 2012b

financial and economic, cultural, civilisational, and military and political areas. That is why integrating with our neighbours is our absolute priority. The future Eurasian Economic Union, which we have declared and which we have discussed extensively as of late, is not just a collection of mutually beneficial agreements. The Eurasian Union is a project for maintaining the identity of nations in the historical Eurasian space in a new century and in a new world. Eurasian integration is a chance for the entire post-Soviet space to become an independent centre for global development, rather than remaining on the outskirts of Europe and Asia.⁹⁰

In this statement, Putin acknowledges the fact that Eurasia has its own identity and that Russia has bestowed upon itself the role of the principal guardian of this identity. The emphasis on the importance of the Eurasian Economic Union in the context of the formation of a multipolar world, consisting of cultural and civilisational areas, furthermore demonstrates that a variety of elements underpin the importance of Eurasia. In addition, this statement neatly summarises the main points of Russian discourse on the EAEU in that it illustrates the focus on sovereignty and the critical value of regional integration in order to survive as a state in the 21st century. This is of course related to Russia's dominant position as the main driving force behind Eurasian integration. As such, Russia occupies a crucial place in global affairs, not only as a regional leader and indispensable part of further global integration and cooperation between countries to its East and West, but by deduction from this position also as a global great power which participates in the maintenance and promotion of global order.

This idea is echoed by Sergey Glazyev, who argues that for Russia to survive and thrive as a great power in global affairs, it needs to fully embrace its Eurasian identity:

The Eurasian idea and Eurasian policy are not only about geopolitics in its traditional sense of domination in the region, but also about fighting for a national system of values, which has in fact become an integral part of the fight for sovereignty and national interests in Eurasia. [...] Russia is facing a clear choice: either become a powerful ideological and civilizational centre in its own right (in keeping with Russian history over the last millennium), as well as an economic and social centre, or integrate with one of the existing power centres and lose its identity.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Putin 2013

⁹¹ Glazyev 2015: 88

This statement completes the circle by referring back to and linking Russia's Eurasian identity and its push for further Eurasian integration with Russia's history as an influential and strong state (or empire). Although it is not certain that President Putin fully shares his advisor's ideas, it nonetheless illustrates the viewpoint among some of the Kremlin's intellectual elite.

In general, the above statements from both Putin and Glazyev show that Eurasia becomes clearly delimited from Europe and Asia, which are seen to have distinctive values. Clear statements with regard to Eurasian values are rare. However, there is a general consensus emerging from the discourses of Russia's governmental elite of what constitute Eurasian values. On top of the list are the protection of sovereignty and self-development of states in the Eurasian space in conjunction with the protection of their identity. On the one hand, the addressee of these values is clearly the West who is considered aggressively trying to impose its model of development on the countries in the Eurasian space. On the other hand, given Russia's aim to establish Eurasia as a key region between (and distinct from) Europe and Asia, such statements reflect the necessity for the countries inhabiting the region to develop their own ideas, values and characteristics. As we have seen in previous statements, Putin highlights the formation of new geopolitical zones at the global level and he makes clear that the formation of the Eurasian region is part of this global development. Hence, Eurasia is an independent centre of global development while it is clearly understood that Russia is at the centre of Eurasia.

5.2. Evolution of discourse

Geography, history and regional (economic) integration are the key themes in Russian government discourse on Eurasia. As the above discussion demonstrated, Russia's centrality, its status as a global power and its role as the leader of the Eurasian region are key determinant issues in Russian foreign policy. Based on the above discussion, the next section traces the evolution of Russian foreign policy discourse on Eurasia over the last fifteen years or so, starting with Putin's first election as president of Russia in 2000. In general, Russian government discourse on Eurasia in the years 2000 to 2015 experienced a number of shifts, most importantly due to external events, while

the protagonists of Russian foreign policy remained largely the same. Up until around 2008, when Vladimir Putin was president, the principal focus on Eurasia was with regard to Russia's geopolitical position and the fact that Russia's territory is part of both the European and Asian continents. Because of this, Russia was often portrayed as a bridge between Europe and Asia and, due to its Eurasian identity, Russia was in a good position to build relations between East and West as well as being a place for dialogue between civilisations. After Putin's return to the presidency in 2012, the Eurasian discourse reached a new dimension, infused with a civilisational approach as well as being supported by the implementation of the Eurasian Economic Union. The narrative in this section focuses on the interaction between external events as well as domestic developments and aims to highlight the ways in which Russia's conception of Eurasia changed as a result thereof. The following table presents a chronological and summarised version of the key events influencing Russian foreign policy (in *italics*) and the dominant keywords in Russian discourse on Eurasia in every year under study (2000-2015).

Table 5.1 Chronological description of Eurasian discourse in Russia

Year	Keywords and key events (<i>in italics</i>)
2000	- Dual European and Asian identity
2001	- Unique geopolitical position - Regional leader - Bridge between Europe and Asia
2002	- Unique geopolitical position - Dual European and Asian identity
2003	<i>20 March: start of Operation Iraqi Freedom, US invasion of Iraq</i> <i>November: Rose revolution in Georgia</i> - Bridge between Europe and Asia
2004	<i>14 March: Putin re-elected as President of Russia with 71 % of vote</i> <i>29 March: 5th NATO enlargement round, including new members Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia</i> <i>1 May: EU enlargement round including Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia</i> <i>November: start of Orange revolution in Ukraine</i> - Vast Eurasian space - Historic community
2005	<i>23 January: Victor Yushchenko inaugurated as President of Ukraine (end of Orange revolution)</i> - Historic community - Common heritage - Regional leader
2006	- Unique geopolitical position
2007	<i>1 January: EU enlargement including Bulgaria and Romania</i> - Unique geopolitical position - Centrality - 'Civilisational commonality'
2008	<i>17 February: Independence of Kosovo</i> <i>2 March: Dmitry Medvedev elected Russian president with 70.5 % of vote</i> <i>2-4 April: NATO Bucharest Summit (Georgia and Ukraine not given Membership Action Plan)</i> <i>7-16 August: 5-day war between Russia and Georgia</i> - Unique geopolitical position - Dual European and Asian identity

	- Geographical size
2009	<i>6 March: meeting in Geneva where Russia-US 'Reset' was officially announced</i> <i>1 April: NATO enlargement round including Albania and Croatia</i> <i>7 May: EU launches Eastern Partnership in Prague</i>
2010	<i>1 January: Customs Union between Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia comes into force</i> <i>8 April: The new START treaty was signed</i> <i>24 June: Russian President Medvedev visit to the White House</i> - Eurasian integration - 'Civilisational commonality' - Common heritage - Unifier of Eurasian region
2011	<i>4 October: Putin publishes 'Eurasian Union' article in Izvestia newspaper</i> <i>4 December: Parliamentary elections in Russia, won by United Russia party with 50 % of votes</i> <i>December (to Feb. 2012): Mass protests against election results and Putin's return to presidency</i> - Eurasian integration/Eurasian union - Bridge between Europe and Asia - Pole in multipolar order - Regional leader
2012	<i>4 March: Putin elected as president with 63.6 % of vote</i> - Eurasian integration - Centrality - Russia's status - Regional leader - Crossroads of cultures - Unifier of Eurasian region
2013	<i>21 November: Ukrainian president Yanukovich suspends planned Association Agreement with EU leading to mass protests</i> <i>November to February 2014: Euromaidan protests in Kiev</i> - Unique geopolitical position - Eurasian integration/Eurasian union - Historic community - Pole in multipolar order
2014	<i>22 February: Ukrainian president Yanukovich ousted</i> <i>19 March: Accession (Annexation) of Crimea to the Russian Federation</i> <i>21 May: Russia and China sign \$400 billion gas deal</i> <i>29 May: Treaty on establishment of Eurasian Economic Union signed by Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia</i> <i>17 July: Downing of airplane MH17 over Eastern Ukraine</i> - Eurasian integration - Pole in multipolar order - Common heritage - Bridge between Europe and Asia - Dual European and Asian identity
2015	<i>1 January: Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) comes into force</i> <i>2 January: Armenia becomes member of the EAEU</i> <i>6 August: Kyrgyzstan joins EAEU</i> <i>30 September: Russia starts carrying out air strikes in Syria</i> - Vast Eurasian space - Eurasian integration - Historic community - Bridge between Europe and Asia

The early years of Russian foreign policy (from around 2001 to 2003) were characterised by an attempt to foster positive relations with the West, and especially the US. One of the basic parameters of Putin's early foreign policy approach was the maintenance of a 'balanced foreign policy', a result of Russia's position as 'both a European and Asian country'.⁹² Similarly, referring to the country's unique

⁹² Putin 2000

geopolitical position, Putin emphasised the fact that Russia was a global player with interests everywhere.⁹³ Stable relations with the West and the US were part of this strategy. In addition, Russia's leaders promoted the idea of a 'Greater Europe', a space ranging from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast, from Lisbon to Vladivostok, as a new form of cooperation between Russia and the EU, which should eventually lead to deeper integration on the continent.⁹⁴ However, the cooperative relationship between Russia and the West proved to be short-lived. At the forefront of mounting tensions was the issue of NATO enlargement. In 2004, seven new countries joined the alliance, including former Warsaw Pact members and the three post-Soviet Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which was seen by Russia as a hostile act, because it pushed the alliance's borders right up to Russia's own borders.⁹⁵

Another break came in 2003 with Washington's decision to invade Iraq without UN mandate. This frustrated the Russian leadership who, as discussed earlier, emphasised the importance of sovereignty and non-interference as key principals in global affairs and strongly opposed the US' unilateral actions.⁹⁶ The question of forcible regime change remained a bitter issue in Russia, especially also with regard to its own neighbourhood. Already in 2001, Putin made clear that Russia considered the post-Soviet space a central priority of its foreign policy and itself the main leader in the region.⁹⁷ Hence, the so-called colour revolutions, starting with the Rose revolution in Georgia in 2003 and followed by the Orange revolution in Ukraine, which started in 2004, further poisoned the relationship between Russia and the West. These events, happening in Russia's backyard, also raised fears among the Russian leadership of similar events taking place in their own country.⁹⁸ Ever since, competition for influence in the post-Soviet space has remained a contentious issue between Russia and the West, including the presence of US military bases in Central Asia, US democracy promotion in the region, NATO overtures to Georgia and Ukraine as well as EU programmes such as the Eastern Partnership, and has led to multiple crises.

⁹³ Putin 2001

⁹⁴ Menkiszak 2013

⁹⁵ Stent 2014: 77-78

⁹⁶ Stent 2014: 82

⁹⁷ Putin 2001

⁹⁸ Mankoff 2009: 82

In this context, aiming to illustrate that Russia considers the post-Soviet space its sphere of privileged interests, the discourse on Eurasia in Putin's 2005 presidential address to the Federal Assembly became more candid. Referring to Russia's historical links to Eurasia and the existence of a historical community on the Eurasian continent, Putin stated that Russia has a civilising mission in Eurasia, while simultaneously calling upon the post-Soviet states which just joined the EU and NATO to respect the rights of Russian citizens abroad as well as human rights more generally.⁹⁹ This statement was a clear hint to the EU and the US, demonstrating Russia's willingness to dominate and influence events in the post-Soviet space. The ultimate statement in this regard followed in Putin's famous speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference where he clearly voiced opposition against a unipolar world under US leadership.¹⁰⁰ This speech must be read in the context of potential further NATO enlargement to countries in the post-Soviet space (specifically Georgia and Ukraine), which Russia saw as Western infringement in its sphere of influence, combined with Russia's strong opposition against US plans to establish a missile defence site in Poland and the Czech Republic. As Trenin already argued in 2006, Russia had left the West, instead aiming to establish its 'own solar system' focusing on improving its presence and influence in the post-Soviet region.¹⁰¹

In this political context, the government discourse on Eurasia starts to take on a new dimension, which is that of the imperative of regional integration and fostering better relations with other countries in Eurasia. The following statement by Foreign Minister Lavrov at a meeting of SCO foreign ministers in 2007 is telling in that it highlights Russia's opposition against a unipolar structure by underlining the importance of equal and respectful cooperation between countries in Eurasia:

Our region, Eurasia, offers an example of the construction of interstate relations in the spirit of equal cooperation, respect for the interests of each other and mutual benefit. [...] And here, I think, the SCO acts as a major factor of the rise of a new international security architecture and of real multipolarity, based on truly collective and legal principles.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Putin 2005

¹⁰⁰ Putin 2007a

¹⁰¹ Trenin 2006: 92

¹⁰² Lavrov 2007a

A first hint at the values that seem to be attached to Russian government discourse on Eurasia can be seen in this statement. Ideals like multipolarity, sovereignty and cooperation among equals are crucial. Also, the focus on the SCO opens up the Eurasian realm as a new place for development and economic opportunities. Russia's political elite continued to speak about Eurasia in possessive terms, referring to it as "our region", as the above statement from Lavrov shows, and clearly marking its dominating presence there. What is more, when speaking about the countries of the CIS, Lavrov refers to a 'civilisational commonality', which links all the former post-Soviet states and facilitates their development and modernisation.¹⁰³

In 2008, Dmitry Medvedev succeeded Putin to the presidency. Medvedev's first statements with regard to Eurasia reflected the importance of Russia's geopolitical location between Europa and Asia and the ensuing potential for Russia to develop better relations and improve trade ties with Asia.

There were two important initiatives with implications for Russian foreign policy in the early years of Medvedev's tenure as president. On the one hand, his modernisation programme in various areas of Russian policy and economy, as outlined in his 2009 article "Go Russia!",¹⁰⁴ and, on the other hand, his proposal for a "pan-European security treaty".¹⁰⁵ In order for the former to be achieved, fostering better relations with Asian countries and integrating with regional economic initiatives in the Asia-Pacific, which should have the positive by-effect of helping develop Russia's Far Eastern and Siberian provinces, was a priority.¹⁰⁶ As Medvedev argued in front of an international audience at the 2008 Valdai Discussion Club meeting, the fact that Russia was a Eurasian country had specific implications. Hence, not only relations with Europe but also relations with Asia were key to the modernisation and ultimate success of Russia's economy. In Medvedev's words: 'We now understand that, without diversifying the country's development to the East, our economy has no future'.¹⁰⁷ In

¹⁰³ Lavrov 2007b

¹⁰⁴ Medvedev 2009

¹⁰⁵ Medvedev first presented the idea in June 2008 in a speech at a meeting with German political, parliamentary and civic leaders and elaborated more in detail in his speech at the World Policy Conference in October 2008 in Evian. The full text of the draft European security treaty is available at <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/275>, accessed 5 September 2016.

¹⁰⁶ Kireeva 2012; Kuhrt 2012

¹⁰⁷ Medvedev 2008c

general, the importance of the Asian vector in Russian foreign policy increased around 2009/2010. In his annual address to the Federal Assembly in 2010, Medvedev argued that ‘Russia’s integration into the Asian-Pacific economic space is of utmost importance’ just as well as fostering better ties to the countries of the region.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, exponents of the academic and think tank community in Russia advocated for some time for a stronger engagement with and deeper integration into Asia. For instance, in the first of a series of reports, a group of authors under the auspices of the Valdai Discussion Club published a report promoting the turn to the East. The authors argued that ‘Russia’s economic and political advance into the Asia-Pacific region is a prerequisite for its internal stability and international competitiveness’. Furthermore, they saw this development as a crucial factor for Russia to be a great power because, according to the authors, ‘only by balancing its Western and Eastern development vectors and system of foreign relations can Russia become a truly modern global power’.¹⁰⁹ Hosting the APEC summit 2012 in Vladivostok, for instance, was seen as a right step towards this goal. Russia’s turn to the East took place in the context of a generally perceived shift of power to the Asia-Pacific region (the US developed its ‘Pivot to Asia’ at around the same time). In accordance with the recommendations of the authors of the Valdai Club report, Russia attempted to diversify its foreign and economic relations to loosen its dependence on the West and Europe. On the other hand, as a self-perceived global great power, Russia’s status simply demanded a stronger Russian involvement in this dynamically developing region.

On another front, Medvedev’s proposal for a pan-European security treaty was an attempt by Russia to propose a reformed and more inclusive European security architecture. According to Moscow, the existing one was outdated and incapable of addressing the security issues facing the Euro-Atlantic region.¹¹⁰ It can also be seen as a further attempt by Russia to promote a practical implementation of its Greater Europe idea in the security realm.¹¹¹ Medvedev’s proposal was acknowledged as being the first time Russia made a positive and constructive proposition at improving Russia’s engagement with the Euro-Atlantic region and becoming a full member within its

¹⁰⁸ Medvedev 2010

¹⁰⁹ Valdai Discussion Club 2012: 5

¹¹⁰ Lo 2009; Pacer 2016: 116-126

¹¹¹ Menkiszak 2013: 19-21

regional security structures.¹¹² However, as others argue, Medvedev's proposal should also be seen in the context of continued Russian opposition to NATO and plans to enlarge the alliance, since it would effectively provide Russia with a veto over many NATO actions.¹¹³ Similarly, Russia's military intervention on behalf of the secessionist republics Abkhazia and South Ossetia in neighbouring Georgia in August 2008 can be interpreted as a clear sign to NATO that Russia was willing to defend its interests in the post-Soviet space, even by force if needed, thus demonstrating where its red lines were.¹¹⁴ The short Russia-Georgia war marked the low-point of an already conflicted and complicated relationship between Russia and the West since the end of the Cold War.¹¹⁵

In the end, the Medvedev presidency was merely an interlude. In September 2011, at the United Russia party congress, Putin announced that he would be running again for president in the 2012 elections, which he went on to win. What this meant for Russian discourse on Eurasia became explicit following the publication of an article by Putin in October 2011 in *Izvestia* in which he outlined his vision to establish a Eurasian Union.¹¹⁶ Once Putin returned to office after the 2012 presidential elections, he started work on implementing the Eurasian Economic Union.

Indeed, Putin made Eurasian integration and the establishment of the Eurasian (Economic) Union one of the priorities of his foreign policy.¹¹⁷ In 2012 then, at the beginning of his third presidential term, Putin made very clear what the new Russian discourse on Eurasia was. Russia now considered itself to be at the centre of Eurasia as well as the main driving force and leader in the region. Indeed, as Putin emphasised in his inaugural speech as third-time president in 2012, Russia's future prospects were dependent on the country's 'ability to become a leader and centre of gravity for the whole of Eurasia'.¹¹⁸ The project of establishing the EAEU was especially depicted as being a foundation for Russia's position as a strong country in global politics because it lent it more credibility and importance in relations with its neighbours in the West

¹¹² Pacer 2016: 117

¹¹³ Bugajski 2010: 84

¹¹⁴ Bugajski 2010: 3-4

¹¹⁵ Stent 2014: 176

¹¹⁶ Putin 2011

¹¹⁷ Liik 2014; Sakwa 2015c: 9

¹¹⁸ Putin 2012b

and the East.¹¹⁹ Interestingly, in another article written in 2012 shortly before moving into office, Putin again called Russia part of Greater Europe and advocated for the creation of a ‘common economic and human space from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean’.¹²⁰ This statement has to be read in conjunction with Putin’s article on the Eurasian Union published a few months before. Indeed, Putin insisted on the complementarity between the proposed Eurasian Union and the European Union and highlighted the potential benefits of strong cooperation between the two unions. In the above-mentioned article, Putin even argued that the ‘Eurasian Union will be based on universal integration principles as an essential part of Greater Europe’, thus again emphasising the cooperative nature of its integration project.¹²¹ However, as Sakwa argues, the idea behind the Greater Europe discourse was to propose ‘an alternative vision of the character of European unity’. Hence, while placing Russia ‘at the heart of an alternative project’, the Greater Europe idea also contained a ‘geopolitical objective’ in that it aimed to compete with the EU as the exclusive integration mechanism in Europe.¹²²

This demonstrates the mindset which existed at the time Putin returned to the presidency: while Eurasian integration was clearly the principal priority of Russian foreign policy, its main target audience was the West and the EU, in particular given that it promoted an image of Russia as an indispensable part of Europe’s development and an ideal link between Europe and Asia. The characterisation of Eurasia also changed in this context. Eurasia became a region clearly distinct from the Euro-Atlantic and the Asia-Pacific. In short, the institutionalisation of Eurasian integration, with the eventual implementation of the EAEU, which was accompanied by Russian attempts to attract new members, painted Russia as the locomotive of its own Eurasian integration project through which Russia intended to cement its place as a pole in the multipolar order.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Trenin 2014: 9–10

¹²⁰ Putin 2012a

¹²¹ Putin 2011

¹²² Sakwa 2012: 321

¹²³ Bordachev and Skriba 2014

5.2.1 The Ukraine crisis as amplifier of Russia's Eurasia discourse

This context is particularly relevant for the analysis of the impact of the Ukraine crisis, which started in 2013 and can be considered a decisive event for Russian foreign policy, on Russian government discourse with regard to Eurasia.¹²⁴ Lukyanov, for instance, argued that one of the principal goals of Eurasian integration from the point of view of Russia was less the general expansion across the former post-Soviet space, but most importantly, to integrate Ukraine within its structures.¹²⁵ Indeed, Russia saw itself in a geopolitical struggle with the EU over influence in their shared neighbourhood and in this context Ukraine, as the biggest of the remaining post-Soviet countries, was at the centre of attention. This had begun before the Ukraine crisis, provoked by the launch of the EU's Eastern Partnership Programme, which had the aim to establish a platform for dialogue between the EU and six post-Soviet states.¹²⁶ This programme was viewed by the Russian leadership with suspicion. They saw it as a geopolitical initiative by the EU to extend its own sphere of influence towards the East trying to draw Russia's neighbours away from Moscow, thus infringing Moscow's own sphere of influence. As Foreign Minister Lavrov stated in a lecture on Russian foreign policy in Moscow, the goal of the Eastern Partnership was to 'expand the West-controlled geopolitical space to the east. [...] There is a policy to confront the CIS countries with a hard, absolutely contrived and artificial choice – either you are with the EU or with Russia'.¹²⁷ Elements of a dynamic of competition between Russia and the EU and a geopolitical confrontation for influence in the post-Soviet space was thus already present.¹²⁸ Therefore, the Ukraine crisis – the suspension of the planned association agreement between the EU and Ukraine (November 2013), the Maidan protests, Yanukovich's ouster as president of Ukraine (February 2014), the emergence of armed movements for self-determination in the Donbas and the ensuing war between the central government in Kiev and separatists in Eastern Ukraine, Russia's annexation of Crimea (March 2014) and support for the separatists, leading to sanctions imposed by the US and EU on Russia – led to the biggest crisis in relations

¹²⁴ For a detailed description and two somewhat diverging analyses of the Ukraine crisis see Wilson 2014 and Sakwa 2015b.

¹²⁵ Lukyanov 2015: 294

¹²⁶ Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit, 7 May 2009, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/107589.pdf, accessed 05 September 2016.

¹²⁷ Lavrov 2014d

¹²⁸ Cadier 2014; Casier 2016: 386-387

between Russia and the West since the end of the Cold War.¹²⁹ From the point of view of the Russian leadership, the Ukraine crisis demonstrated that the West was unwilling to accept Russia's position as an independent and powerful actor in global politics as well as the regional hegemon in Eurasia.¹³⁰ Furthermore, the Russian government felt its claim for a privileged access to the countries surrounding it (the post-Soviet states) was not respected.

As a result of the events in Ukraine, the Eurasian discourse in Moscow and the push for the expansion of Eurasian integration became much stronger.¹³¹ As Russian analysts have argued, the Ukraine crisis and concomitant deterioration of relations between Russia and the West have 'boosted' the 'Eurasian vector of Russia's foreign policy'.¹³² Or, as Trenin argued, the Ukraine crisis had an impact on Russia in that it 'moved back to its traditional position as a Eurasian power sitting between the East and the West'.¹³³ According to Lukyanov, without Ukraine, the EAEU would indeed become more Eurasian because it moved further away from Europe with the consequence that the future orientation of the organisation was thus conditioned to be rather to the East and the South.¹³⁴ One Russian think tank analyst argued that since the start of the Ukraine crisis, there had been a shift in the emphasis of Eurasia away from a European notion of Eurasia to an Asian notion (from Greater Europe to Greater Asia). According to the same analyst, the implication of this shift was that instead of the traditional European values, Eurasia was now dominated by other values based on the differences between Europe and Russia.¹³⁵ Indeed, in Putin's view, through the institutionalisation of the Eurasian (Economic) Union, the Eurasian region now finally was able to emancipate itself and become an 'independent centre for global development, rather than remaining on the outskirts of Europe and Asia'.¹³⁶

This assessment is in line with the general development during the third Putin presidency which started to question Russia's historical and traditional alignment with

¹²⁹ Sakwa 2015b

¹³⁰ Tsygankov 2015

¹³¹ Svarin 2016

¹³² Timofeev and Alekseenkova 2015: 5

¹³³ Trenin 2015a: 3

¹³⁴ Lukyanov 2015: 296

¹³⁵ Interview with think tank analyst, Moscow, 12 May 2015

¹³⁶ Putin 2013

and emulation of the European model. Hence, the argument that ‘modernity might also lie somewhere else than Europe’ became dominant.¹³⁷ Similarly, another Russian analyst claimed that one reason for this shift also lay with tendencies in Europe, which sought ever closer alignment with the US. Therefore, Europe ceased to be a part of Eurasia and thus facilitated the shift within Eurasia from the notion of Greater Europe to Greater Asia.¹³⁸ The Ukraine crisis and strained relations with the West resulted in two further consequences for Russian foreign policy and discourse. On the one hand, the ongoing work to implement the Eurasian (Economic) Union was accelerated and, on the other hand, Russia’s turn to the East and discourse on the Asian vector of Russian foreign policy intensified to the detriment of Russia’s Euro-Atlantic discourse.¹³⁹

As a consequence of Russia’s failure to draw Ukraine into the Eurasian Economic Union (which became evident when Ukraine signed the Association Agreement with the EU in March and June 2014), Vieira argues that the Russian narrative changed in that the EAEU could not be successfully described as a counterweight to the EU. The practical result of this, however, was that in the wake of the Ukraine crisis, Russia pushed even more strongly for a rapid signing of the treaty and implementation of the EAEU.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, in 2014, statements about the Eurasian (Economic) Union and its importance for the Eurasian region are very frequent. For instance in his meeting with Russian ambassadors, President Putin praised the signing of the EAEU agreement as a crucial development for the region and one of the long-term strategic priorities of Russian foreign policy.¹⁴¹ Foreign Minister Lavrov on his part delivered a lengthy lecture on Russian foreign policy where he called the EAEU ‘a project of historical significance’ and reiterated the ambitious goal of it acting as a link between the various integration mechanisms in Europe and the Asia-Pacific.¹⁴² In general, the emphasis on Russia’s neighbours and the CIS in particular, is a constant feature of the elite’s discourse and integration and good relations with its neighbours are seen as the key,

¹³⁷ Interview with think tank analyst, Moscow, 12 May 2015

¹³⁸ Interview with academic, Moscow, 4 June 2015. This vision’s essence is the existence of two big geopolitical blocs: on the one hand, the Euro-Atlantic community including Europe and the US and, on the other hand, Eurasia including Russia and China.

¹³⁹ Svarin 2016: 134-139

¹⁴⁰ Vieira 2016: 570

¹⁴¹ Putin 2014b

¹⁴² Lavrov 2014d

not only for the good working of the Eurasian Union, but also for the successful conduct of Russian foreign policy.¹⁴³ It thus appears that the new Eurasian discourse also serves to demonstrate Moscow's opposition against US dominance and its promotion of the multipolar order. As discussed earlier, the Russian government elite repeatedly alludes to the importance and inevitability of multipolarity (or polycentrism) as a guiding principle of international relations. In his speech at the Seliger Youth Forum in 2014, Lavrov argued that the 'transition to a polycentric world order reflects an objective trend according to which the world order should be based on the world's cultural and civilisational diversity'.¹⁴⁴ This statement is illustrative against the background that Russia emphasises the cultural closeness between Russia and its post-Soviet neighbours.¹⁴⁵ As a Russian analyst pointed out, the underlying assumption of a multipolar world order is that every global power (including Russia) is in charge of and represents a region and in the case of Russia, this region is Eurasia.¹⁴⁶

The unprecedented low in Russia-West relations following the Ukraine crisis not only resulted in an intensification of Russian efforts to establish and promote Eurasian integration, it also changed the quality of Russia's discourse about the Euro-Atlantic region. While the theme of NATO enlargement always had been a contentious issue in Russia-West relations, it became even stronger after the Ukraine crisis. For Russian officials, the Ukraine crisis illustrated the US' and EU's willingness to exclude Russia from the Euro-Atlantic in order to maintain their dominating position. Speaking at the UN general assembly in 2014, Foreign Minister Lavrov remarked with regard to the Ukraine crisis that:

the situation [in Ukraine] has revealed the remaining deep-rooted systemic flaws of the existing architecture in the Euro-Atlantic area. The West has embarked upon a course towards "the vertical structuring of humanity" tailored to its own hardly inoffensive

¹⁴³ Putin 2015b; Lavrov 2015c

¹⁴⁴ Lavrov 2014b

¹⁴⁵ See for example the 2013 Foreign Policy Concept where it is written that 'Russia intends to actively contribute to the development of interaction among CIS Member States in the humanitarian sphere on the ground of preserving and increasing common cultural and civilizational heritage which is an essential resource for the CIS as a whole and for each of the Commonwealth's Member States in the context of globalization' (Russian Federation 2013) or Putin's *Izvestia* article where he speaks about how the CIS helped preserve 'the myriad of ties, both of civilisation and culture, which unite our peoples' (Putin 2011).

¹⁴⁶ Interview with academic, Moscow, 3 June 2015

standards. After they declared victory in the Cold War and the “end of history,” the US and the EU opted for expanding the geopolitical area under their control without taking into account the balance of legitimate interests of all the people of Europe.¹⁴⁷

As we have seen above, Russia for a long time insisted on its belonging to the Euro-Atlantic community and even made proposals for a new organisation of this space (at least in the security realm). However, the pan-European security treaty which Medvedev presented in 2009 only received lukewarm responses from Western states. Therefore, Lavrov lamented that while Russia was seeking cooperative relations, its ‘western partners have promoted their own agenda, ignoring Russia’s interests in many points, expanded NATO, and generally attempted to move the geopolitical space under their control directly to the Russian borders’.¹⁴⁸ In such a context, the objective of Russian integration into the Euro-Atlantic community continued to exist only on paper. Despite frequent allusions to Russia’s European character, there has been a shift away from Europe to a notion of Russia as an exceptional civilisation. As Tsygankov argues, this shift and Russia’s alienation from the West gained impetus due to the Ukraine crisis.¹⁴⁹ Similarly, Linde argues that Russia’s emphasis on civilisational distinctiveness in conjunction with increasing criticism of Western values and unilateral actions, while at the same time insisting on Russia’s belonging to the Euro-Atlantic civilisation, resulted in an inherent contradiction, which ultimately made Russia’s pan-European discourse untenable.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, Foreign Minister Lavrov also recognised the difficulty of maintaining a cooperative partnership with the West in this context:

The events in Ukraine were not a manifestation of new trends, but rather a culmination of the course implemented by our western partners for many years with regard to Russia. In fact, the habit not to perceive Russians as being of their kind has been present in Western Europe for centuries [...] I would not like to go deep into contemplations about why we cannot reach true partnership in Europe – differences in worldview, historical experience, traditions, and finally the size of our country evidently play their role.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Lavrov 2014c

¹⁴⁸ Lavrov 2014a

¹⁴⁹ Tsygankov 2016b

¹⁵⁰ Linde 2016

¹⁵¹ Lavrov 2014a

The Ukraine crisis not only had important ramifications for Russia's relations with the West. A further crucial consequence of this crisis was an intensification of Moscow's activities in its Asian vector and a turn to the East and China in particular.¹⁵² According to Alexander Gabuev, in the aftermath of the Ukraine crisis, Russia was looking for a new major partner, which it eventually found in China.¹⁵³ This also had important implications for Russia's Eurasian discourse and the overall development of the Eurasian region. As Putin said in a joint interview with Russian and Chinese news agencies, Russia and China should strive to integrate their respective regional integration schemes, namely the Eurasian (Economic) Union and the Chinese One Belt, One Road project: 'This is the beginning of a process of coordinating our long-term development priorities to give a strong impetus to economic activity on the vast expanses of Eurasia'.¹⁵⁴ During a visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Moscow in May 2015, the two countries even signed a joint declaration on cooperation between the EAEU and the Silk Road Economic Belt. Nevertheless, Gabuev argues that this development is at least partially also due to Russia's estrangement with the West, thus leaving Russia no other choice than to cooperate with China. In this situation, Russia accepted the role of junior partner because the benefits of closer cooperation with China still outweighed its disadvantages.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, the cooperation between Russia's and China's Eurasian projects and Russia's idea of forming a Greater Eurasia 'is intended to create the impression that it is Moscow that is taking the initiative in Russian-Chinese relations, and thereby to conceal and legitimise the growing asymmetry in bilateral relations'.¹⁵⁶

In general, Russia's rapprochement with China had implications for Russian discourses on Eurasia. The convergence of the EAEU and the Chinese OBOR initiative were the key elements in the formation of what Russian pundits call Greater Eurasia.¹⁵⁷ According to a group of Russian scholars, Russia should exploit the current momentum and make the turn towards China permanent because this would also cement Eurasia's role in global politics:

¹⁵² Lukin 2016: 577; Tsygankov 2016b: 146

¹⁵³ Gabuev 2016

¹⁵⁴ Putin 2015a

¹⁵⁵ Gabuev 2016: 31

¹⁵⁶ Kaczmariski and Rodkiewicz 2016: 3

¹⁵⁷ Karaganov 2015

Our aim is to make the strategic rapprochement and unprecedented trust between Russia and China irreversible. [...] This will make it possible, as early as in the mid-term, to come close to establishing in Eurasia a new international political entity based on common interests and many shared values. This will rally Eurasia and make it an independent center of power and influence on a global scale.¹⁵⁸

In the reading of the authors of the cited Valdai Club report, the dynamism emanating from China's New Silk Road project in conjunction with the establishment and development of the Eurasian Economic Union presents Russia with a golden opportunity to promote and foster the economic development of the Eurasian region.¹⁵⁹ It is important to note, as mentioned above, that Russia's push for Greater Eurasia and the cooperation between the EAEU and the Chinese OBOR project is also due to Russia's strained relations with the West. Furthermore, as the prominent Russian foreign policy analyst Karaganov argues, Russia's turn to the East not only responded to an economic logic, but it was also 'assuming geopolitical and civilizational features' since Europe refused to treat Russia as an equal while Russia was actually embracing European values (which, according to Karaganov, Europe itself had abandoned).¹⁶⁰ However, Karaganov cautions against forcing Russia to choose between East and West because Russia represents both a 'great Eurasian and Atlantic-Pacific power', which has the benefit of 'absorbing resources and the best practices of its mother civilization in Europe and the resurging Asian one'.¹⁶¹ The same logic can be found in some statements by Russian officials. From the outset, Putin characterised the EAEU as an open project and a link between East and West. Indeed, the principal issue is that Russia tries to promote an image of itself as the centre of Eurasia, as a positive force that promotes the multipolar global order. It is interesting to note that, according to Wilson, Russia was behind the initiative to sign a joint declaration on cooperation between the EAEU and the Chinese New Silk Road and that the declaration's entire text was written by Russia without input from China.¹⁶² Wilson even argues that the main target of Russia's discourse on Greater Eurasia is actually the West and

¹⁵⁸ Valdai Discussion Club 2016: 35-36

¹⁵⁹ See also the previous report, entitled "Creating Central Eurasia", from the same group of authors (Valdai Discussion Club 2015).

¹⁶⁰ Karaganov 2016

¹⁶¹ Karaganov 2016

¹⁶² Wilson 2016: 119

Europe.¹⁶³ Hence, the rationale behind the Greater Eurasia idea is similar to the rationale behind the Greater Europe idea, namely an attempt by Russia to promote a positive and cooperative idea for relations with its neighbours and positioning Russia as an indispensable part of developing regional economic cooperation.¹⁶⁴ Indeed, Russian analysts argue that Europe should be part of Greater Eurasia. Karaganov, for instance, argues that ‘the Greater Eurasian Community concept should by all means include the western, European, part of the continent, for this will ultimately benefit Europe which has entered a period of deep crisis and has to adapt to new realities’.¹⁶⁵ Similarly, Trenin, while cautioning against an overreliance on China, promotes a third way by arguing that Russia should indeed aim for a Greater Eurasia. However, in his reading, this means instead of integrating with Europe or building a Greater Asia, which would mean focusing too much on China, ‘Moscow should aim instead for a greater Eurasia, benefiting from its equally close ties with its neighbors east, west and south’.¹⁶⁶

As we have seen, the Ukraine crisis, the deterioration of relations between Russia and the West and the warming of ties with China had an important effect on Russian government discourse on Eurasia. The principal focus was on Eurasian integration, not surprising given the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union in January 2015. On the other hand, the discourse also attempted to shape Eurasia as an independent region which was being developed by Russia with the help of other partners, mainly China. Despite the enthusiastic calls by some Russian academics for Russia-China cooperation and joint development in creating the Greater Eurasia, the government elite seems to see the relationship more pragmatically. In a joint interview with Chinese and Russian media outlets, Sergey Lavrov made the following statement: ‘we don’t oppose Eurasian and other integration processes, but are ready to help correlate them and to build bridges between Europe and the Asia Pacific region. China’s Silk Road Economic Belt concept has the same constructive essence’.¹⁶⁷ Hence, Russia-China cooperation in Eurasia is important and can help develop the region’s infrastructure and economy. Yet, Eurasian integration as defined by Lavrov remains a

¹⁶³ Wilson 2016: 124

¹⁶⁴ Kaczmarek and Rodkiewicz 2016: 6

¹⁶⁵ Karaganov 2016

¹⁶⁶ Trenin 2016: 22

¹⁶⁷ Lavrov 2015b

purely Russian affair. This is needed for Russia to retain its influence in the post-Soviet space (also in the context of increasing Chinese pressure and expansion into Central Asia) by promoting a positive outlook and providing a framework for cooperation and development of the Eurasian region.

5.3 Synthesis

This chapter analysed the importance of Eurasia for Russia and the way in which Russia's governing elite attributes meaning to the Eurasian 'geopolitical space'. Through a close reading of discourses by members of the Russian governing elite, four overarching and rather general themes have been identified: Russia's geographical location, its historical and cultural experience, the economic potential of Eurasia and the need for regional integration.

In general, geography, or more specifically Russia's geographical location as well as the country's size, have a major impact on the formulation and conduct of Russian foreign policy. Due to the vast expanse of the country, Russia's governing elite places their country at the centre of Eurasia as well as in various geographical regions. The country's dual identity as both European and Asian is especially frequently emphasised. Russian officials highlight their country's European roots and civilisational belonging to Europe and the Euro-Atlantic space while at the same time using their country's Eurasian location and identity as a justification for Russia's belonging to and involvement in the Asia-Pacific region. In general, Russia's identity is described as not just European and Asian, but as essentially Eurasian on the basis of its geographic location. Furthermore, Russia's geopolitical position as Eurasian power also bestows upon it a special role. According to Putin, 'Russia, as a unique Eurasian power, has always played a special role in building relations between the East and the West'.¹⁶⁸ This role as a bridge, which is a function of the country's geographical location, is a characteristic of Russia. However, this image also has historical roots, and it is here where geographical and historical arguments come together in emphasising the particularity and importance of Russia's Eurasian location.

¹⁶⁸ Putin 2003c

The geographical aspects of the Eurasia discourse of Russia's governing elite, such as portraying Russia as belonging to both Europe and Asia as well as being a bridge between the two, appears only logical. The same applies to the more recent discourse on Eurasian integration which describes the EAEU as an 'efficient bridge between Europe and the dynamic Asia-Pacific region'.¹⁶⁹ Hence, the EAEU becomes an extension of Russia in the sense that it is now through this organisation that Russia bridges East and West. In general, Russia considers itself to be part of three geopolitical spaces – Eurasia, Euro-Atlantic and Asia-Pacific – if only by nature of its size and geographical location.¹⁷⁰ However, among these, the Eurasian space occupies a special position because it also links the two other spaces. Indeed, there are different aspects pertaining to a geographical reading of Russia's Eurasian identity, from the simple fact that Russia is both European and Asian and thus Eurasian, to the opportunities and foreign policy focus this offers. There is a geographical component in that Russia does indeed consider itself to be at the centre of Eurasia. It is this centrality in the Eurasian geography which matters for Russia in that it becomes the most important scene for Russia's political and economic development as well as the place where Russia's ambitions and self-understanding as a great global power is grounded.

Russia's identity and its position in the global system are strongly linked to past experiences and Moscow's role as the imperial centre of subsequent regional and global empires. At the foundation lies Eurasia, the geography in which Russia's imperial past is grounded. As Medvedev wrote in a newspaper article, 'we have centuries-long experience at the crossroads of different cultures and civilisations. No wonder Russia is called a Eurasian [...] country'.¹⁷¹ Russia's history is linked to Eurasia and in turn the political community which emerged there is closely linked to Russia. Russia's governing elite highlighted the existence of a historic community in Eurasia, which still today links the countries of the former Soviet Union to each other and which has an impact on the future development of the region in the context of Eurasian integration. An additional element is the fact that Russia unites elements of both European and Asian civilisations on its territory. The Russian discourse thus

¹⁶⁹ Putin 2011

¹⁷⁰ Svarin 2016

¹⁷¹ Medvedev 2012

mixes geographical aspects with cultural and civilisational references in order to emphasise Russia's centrality in Eurasia and to describe it as a major advantage for the country but also for the international system more generally. The nature of the Russian state, which had been forged over centuries of state-building, as a multi-ethnic entity uniting many cultures and peoples is linked to Russia's Eurasian position and identity. Eurasia thus is an important characteristic of Russia's identity and its historical roots influence contemporary foreign policy.

The other big theme in the discourses of Russia's government officials on Eurasia is the economy and more specifically, economic integration in Eurasia. Towards the latter years of Putin's second presidential term, the nature of the international system became a concern with direct repercussions for Russia's view of Eurasia and regional integration starts to occupy a more prominent place in government discourses. In this context, Eurasia occupies an important place as a synonym for regional integration. The underlying reasoning is that because the 21st century is multipolar, every country needs to cooperate with others, and regional organisations are instrumental in this regard. This in turn, and especially in the case of Russian efforts to integrate the Eurasian region, was also seen as a guarantee for Russia to continue to occupy an important position as a great power. Putin also stated that the Eurasian Union should become a bridge between Europe and Asia, similar to the character ascribed to Russia in earlier years due to its Eurasian geopolitical location.

With the official implementation of the EAEU in January 2015, Eurasian integration officially became a political and economic reality. President Putin himself emphasised that the EAEU's mission went beyond economic integration alone, by arguing that the 'Eurasian Union is a project for maintaining the identity of nations in the historical Eurasian space in a new century and in a new world'.¹⁷² Eurasia now stands as an independent region in global affairs and Russia's position at the centre of Eurasia thus also guarantees it an important position globally as an influential and non-negligible player. Putin highlights the formation of new geopolitical zones at the global level and he makes clear that the formation of the Eurasian region is part of this global development. Hence, Eurasia is an independent centre of global development while it

¹⁷² Putin 2013

is clearly understood that Russia is at the centre of Eurasia. Put differently, the Eurasian Union thus functions as the institutionalised embodiment of Russia's Eurasian identity.

Eurasia has been a constant feature in Russian government discourse from 2000 to 2015. Over the years, up until the present moment, the theme of Eurasian integration has become the most dominant one. Obviously, this discourse is also infused with geographical and historical references. Yet, its outlook is future-oriented in that it provides a new way for Russia to see Eurasia and its own place within Eurasia. Especially in the context of the Ukraine crisis, which started in 2013-2014 and the subsequent low in relations with the West, this discourse has been reinforced. However, the groundwork for an intensified Eurasian discourse had already been laid before, becoming visible when Vladimir Putin took over the presidency for a third term in 2012. In his inauguration speech as president, Putin stated that Russia's destiny depended on the country's ability to promote further economic integration, including within Eurasia, and that Russia thus needed to 'become a leader and centre of gravity for the whole of Eurasia'.¹⁷³ At this moment, Putin made clear how he saw Russia's position in the Eurasian region, namely as the dominating power and the region's leader. Similarly, the idea of the Eurasian Union, which President Putin proposed around the same time, can be understood in this context. Russia being the main driving force and promoter of the EAEU thus automatically assumes the role of the leader of the region. With the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union the status of the Eurasian region changed through the addition of an institutional framework which was furthermore oriented towards further expansion and cooperation with other countries and regional integration projects.

As a result, Russia's relationship with Eurasia is significantly upgraded. Hence, the foreign policy concept of 2013 for the first time makes the distinction between the following three regions: Euro-Atlantic, Eurasia and Asia-Pacific. The context for this distinction is a statement about the importance of the coherence of regions in order to build 'oases of peace and security' and how 'the only reliable insurance against possible shocks is compliance with universal principles of equal and indivisible

¹⁷³ Putin 2012b

security in respect of the Euro-Atlantic, Eurasian and Asia-Pacific regions'.¹⁷⁴ This was preceded by a statement by Foreign Minister Lavrov in an interview with *Reuters* in December 2011 where he argued that Eurasian integration, as well as other integration efforts globally, are crucial in order 'to ensure the sustainability of the world order emerging before our eyes'. Lavrov then mentions an additional task in this context which is 'to create a space of peace and stability based on universal principles of equal and indivisible security, mutual trust, transparency and predictability', which not only applies to Eurasian integration but also to other regions such as the Euro-Atlantic and Asia-Pacific, which are mentioned specifically.¹⁷⁵ Such statements are particularly interesting since they discursively ascribe a specific regional character to Eurasia, thus shaping it into an independent region and one of the principal poles in the new global order. In order for Eurasia to be considered by other states as an independent region, Eurasian integration serves an important function. It delineates the nucleus of the region and gives Russia a platform to promote Eurasian development.

In this regard, according to Putin, Eurasian integration has an important function, not just for Russia, but for the entire post-Soviet space, because it 'is a chance for the entire post-Soviet space to become an independent centre for global development, rather than remaining on the outskirts of Europe and Asia'.¹⁷⁶ This statement illustrates that Eurasia is clearly delimited from Europe and Asia and has gained the identity of an independent global centre. While the focus is on economic development, the subsequent statement from Putin, made in the same speech, adds another dimension to it: 'The Eurasian Union is a project for maintaining the identity of nations in the historical Eurasian space in a new century and in a new world'.¹⁷⁷ The Eurasian Union thus is clearly linked to the member countries' national identity in that it becomes an important aspect in its definition. It furthermore demonstrates and adds upon the previous point that Eurasia is distinct from Europe and Asia. In the context of the Ukraine crisis and the subsequent deterioration of relations between Russia and the West, this distinction was further accentuated. Not only was this the point where it became clear for Russia that integration into the Euro-Atlantic space was impossible, it also changed the meaning of Eurasia for Russian foreign policy. As we have seen in

¹⁷⁴ Russian Federation 2013

¹⁷⁵ Lavrov 2011b

¹⁷⁶ Putin 2013

¹⁷⁷ Putin 2013

previous statements, Putin highlighted the formation of new geopolitical zones at the global level and made clear that the formation of the Eurasian region was a part of this global development. Hence, Eurasia became an independent centre of global development while it was clearly understood that Russia is at the centre of Eurasia.

Chapter 6: Eurasia in Turkish discourse

This chapter examines the place of Eurasia in Turkish government discourse. It is structured along two axes: a topical description focusing on the main themes covered in the discourses followed by a chronological description of the evolution of the discourse. The key feature with regard to the governing elite's discourse on Eurasia is a multiple and interlinked focus on geographical, historical and cultural aspects. These aspects are constantly emphasised in different ways by the political leaders of the country. This is perfectly illustrated in the following statement by Prime Minister Erdoğan, taken from a speech delivered at the Turkish think tank International Strategic Research Organization (USAK) in 2010:

Our accumulation of history, our cultural prosperity, human potential and geographical position provide us with inimitable opportunities and attribute to us very important missions. Turkey, with its unique position between regions and continents and also with its accumulation of civilization, culture and policy, has great strategic importance.¹

As the subsequent analysis will show, geography is the dominant theme in Turkish government discourse on Eurasia. The key factors here are Turkey's geographical location at the intersection of different continents, its concomitant belonging to both Europe and Asia and, as a consequence of these two factors, its centrality in the Eurasian or Afro-Eurasian region. Geopolitical images, such as Turkey as a central country and Turkey as a bridge, are important elements of the governing elites' discourse. Furthermore, Turkey's historical experience, which is closely linked to the regional geography, and the cultural and ethnic links across the former Ottoman imperial lands and the vast Eurasian region are foundations for Turkey's role in Eurasia. Hence, Turkish officials frequently emphasise historical links when highlighting the importance of Eurasia and especially the countries in Central Asia in Turkish foreign policy. Finally, when it comes to the theme of economy, energy is the central element in the foreign policy discourse. Linked both to the country's geographical situation as well as its privileged links to many energy-rich countries, the

¹ Erdoğan 2010a

aim of Turkey's energy policy is to develop into an energy hub at the centre of Eurasia, thus connecting the East with the West.

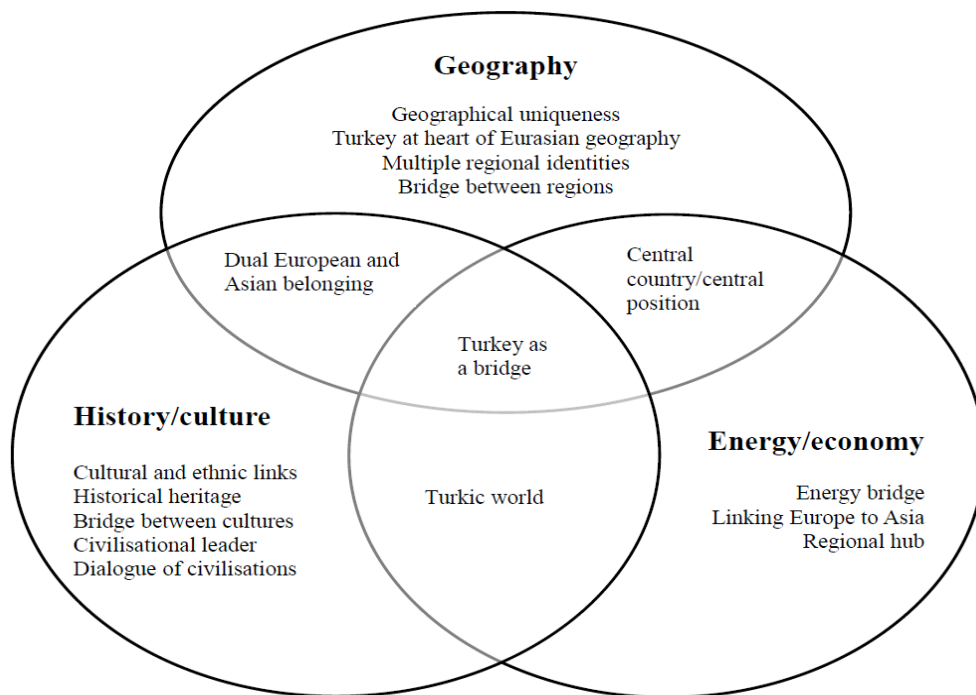
This chapter has two aims: it analyses the discourse of Turkey's governing elite with regard to the geopolitical concept of Eurasia and it traces the evolution of the importance of this concept in Turkish foreign policy over the period under study (2002-2015). It is argued, that in the early years of the AKP rule, from around 2002 to 2007, Eurasia occupied a central position in Turkish government discourse, Foreign Minister Gül being the key promoter of the idea of Turkey as a Eurasian country. However, this image was primarily based on a pragmatic assessment of Turkey's interests and opportunities and less on ideological considerations. After 2007, when Ahmet Davutoğlu increasingly moved to the centre of Turkish foreign policy making, the place of Eurasia in the elite's geopolitical imagination experienced a slight shift to a wider vision of Turkey as the centre of Afro-Eurasia. Simultaneously, civilisational aspects became increasingly central to Turkish foreign policy. Hence, a refocusing on the region of the former Ottoman Empire and its immediate neighbourhood in the Middle East took place in Turkish foreign policy. Still, as the following discussion will show, the idea of Eurasia and its place in Turkey's geopolitical imagination was kept alive.

This thesis focuses on the importance of 'space' and the geographical situation of a country in the formulation of its foreign policy. It has been argued that it is only through the discursive practices of foreign policy elites that meaning is attached to geopolitical space. This chapter thus depicts the principal themes in Turkish foreign policy with regard to Eurasia through an analysis of government elite discourse while studying how the discourse evolved over the years. Furthermore, this chapter identifies several characteristics and role perceptions in the geopolitical imagination of Turkey's governing elite, which will be further discussed in the next chapter. This chapter is divided into two parts: the first part focuses on a thematic description of Turkey's Eurasian discourse on the basis of the four main themes – geography, history, culture, economy – covered in the discourses. This is followed by a second part which discusses the evolution of the discourse in a chronological manner focusing on main events in foreign policy and Turkish politics and how they influenced Turkish officials' discourse on Eurasia.

6.1 Prevalent themes

This section covers the dominant themes in the Turkish government discourse on Eurasia. As described in Chapter 2, these themes were determined by reading a sample of discourses from Turkish officials, allowing for the identification of the principal themes and keywords with regard to geographical and geopolitical assumptions in Turkish discourse and national identity conceptions. Four broad categories – geography, history, culture, and economy – were identified and each category comprises several key words which cover the basic conceptions of and references to Eurasia in Turkish discourse (see *Figure 2.3*). For the subsequent discussion in this chapter, they are grouped into three overarching and rather general themes. In the first part, I will discuss the importance of geography in Turkish officials' discourse on Eurasia before moving on to the second category which groups together historical and cultural aspects of the discourse. In the third part, the discussion focuses on the economy and the issue of energy as a dominant aspect in Turkey's Eurasian discourse. Each section will take a close look at the main issues within each theme and work with direct quotes taken from the Turkish officials' discourses. The main aspects and keywords of each theme and the way in which they overlap are schematically represented in *Figure 6.1* below.

Figure 6.1 Main themes in Turkey's Eurasian discourse



6.1.1 Geography

Geography is the dominant theme in Turkish government discourse on Eurasia and its importance is constantly emphasised. Turkey's belonging to both Europe and Asia, its centrality in the Eurasian region (or in Davutoğlu's words Afro-Eurasia), as well as its position at the intersection of different regions are the principal factors. In addition, the idea of Turkey acting as a bridge between regions and civilisations is another constant feature in the discourse.

To give context to the following discussion, it is important to take note of the way in which geography influences the thinking of Turkey's governing elite.² By simply looking at a map of the region, it becomes obvious that Turkey occupies a geographically particular and central role since it lies at the intersection of many geographical and political regions between Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Indeed, as Davutoğlu writes in an article about Turkey's foreign policy vision, 'Turkey's geography gives it a specific central country status', which is distinct from any other country.³ As we have seen before and will come back to, the notion of Turkey being a central country occupies a prominent role in Davutoğlu's foreign policy thinking. Furthermore, as a result of this position, Turkey has many identities and regional belongings as the then Foreign Minister Babacan illustrated in a speech in 2009:

Turkey is a European country, but Turkey is also an Asian country. Turkey is a country in the Balkans. Turkey is also a country in the Caucasus. Turkey is a Mediterranean country. Turkey is also a Black Sea country. Turkey is also a country very close to the Middle East as well. [...] Turkey is a country in many different regions at the same time.⁴

For Turkish officials, this geographical reality is one of the fundamental principles in Turkish foreign policy. This geopolitically infused reading of the country's unique location – sitting at the intersection of different geographical regions and cultures – predetermines the role Turkey can play in global affairs. Geopolitics and geographical determinism are prevalent in Turkish foreign policy. As Bilgin argues, this has been

² Bilgin 2007

³ Davutoğlu 2008: 78

⁴ Babacan 2009

the case since the 1950s, although originally such notions were confined to military actors before also being adopted and promoted by civilian actors and successive governments.⁵ In essence, according to Bilgin, the common vision of all these actors is ‘that Turkey’s geographical location is more unique than others are, and that it has more deterministic power over Turkey’s policies than in some other countries’.⁶ Similarly, Yanik argues that Turkish government officials’ references to Turkey’s geography (and its history) by invoking metaphors such as ‘the bridge’ or emphasising Turkey’s position on various continents also serve the purpose of portraying Turkey as an ‘exceptional’ state.⁷ Hence, geography is a crucial, ever-present feature in Turkish foreign policy discourse.

Babacan’s successor as foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, is one of the foremost promoters of a deterministic geographical reading of Turkey’s position. In one of his articles he claimed that ‘in terms of geography, Turkey occupies a *unique space*’ and that as a result of this position, Turkey ‘may be defined as a central country with multiple regional identities that cannot be reduced to one unified character’.⁸ He furthermore also strongly emphasised the importance of geography (and history) for Turkey and its foreign policy. In an interview with *Newsweek* magazine he explained that geography was the key to understanding Turkey’s stance on a variety of global issues: ‘you have to understand the geography and the history of Turkey. We are a European country and we are an Asian country’. As a result, Davutoğlu concluded, ‘Turkish foreign policy has to be multiregional, multidimensional’.⁹ A few months earlier in a speech at the 2009 annual conference on US-Turkish relations, Davutoğlu went even further. He contrasted the US’ geographical position to that of Turkey and claimed that Turkey’s ‘geographical uniqueness’ differed from the US due to its geographically strategic position ‘at the centre of Afro-Eurasia’ and in the proximity to Europe, Asia and even Africa. This ‘geographical uniqueness’, however, is not negative but, according to Davutoğlu, an asset which ‘can make Turkey a really important player in world politics’.¹⁰ In short, Turkey’s geography occupies a defining

⁵ Bilgin 2007

⁶ Bilgin 2007: 751. See also Aydin 1999: 157

⁷ Yanik 2011

⁸ Davutoğlu 2008: 78, emphasis added.

⁹ Davutoğlu 2009c

¹⁰ Davutoğlu 2009b

spot in the government officials' perception of their country's importance as well as in the formulation of its foreign policy.

Turkey's self-perception as both a European and an Asian country is the basic parameter in the official's discourse with regard to Eurasia. In a number of different statements, Turkey's governing elite made reference to this dual identity. Hence, in response to a question from the US TV host Charlie Rose about whether Turkey wants to be a part of Europe, Prime Minister Erdoğan responded that 'if we look at this from a geographic point of view, Turkey is part of Europe and Turkey is part of Asia as well, geographically speaking'.¹¹ Similarly, in relation to Turkey's strategic importance to Europe and the West, President Gül reminded the readers of *First Magazine* that 'the world's economic and political gravity is shifting towards Asia' and Turkey thus is in an ideal position because 'Turkey is a country that is located in both Asia and Europe'.¹² As we will see in more detail below, such statements are not only anchored in a geographical but also in a historical reading as the following statement from Gül illustrates: 'Throughout history, we have always been a part of both Europe and Asia, constituting a natural bridge between these two geographies'.¹³ As such, Turkey sits neatly between the two continents providing the connection between them. This idea of Turkey acting as a bridge, both literally and metaphorically, and to which we will turn later, is an important element in the government discourses and has been adopted by a variety of actors.¹⁴

In general, the significance of their country's geography for its foreign policy is perceived as an important element by the ruling elite in Ankara. This deterministic stance is also emphasised by then Prime Minister Erdoğan who, in a widely distributed opinion piece, argued that the 'geography [stretching from the Balkans to the Middle East and the Caucasus] is Turkey's natural historical and cultural hinterland. [...and that] Turkey cannot remain indifferent to this geography, for it stands at the center of it'.¹⁵ In that sense, Turkey is the quintessential Eurasian country regrouping on its territory the geographical, historical and cultural links across Eurasia. In general, the

¹¹ Erdoğan 2010b

¹² Gül 2010

¹³ Gül 2003b

¹⁴ Yanik 2009

¹⁵ Erdoğan 2010c

idea of Turkey being a central country, also with regard to Eurasia, is an important theme and on different occasions Turkey's government officials highlight this notion. This is especially the case with regard to Turkey's role in global diplomacy as exemplified by a statement from President Erdoğan during a state visit to Indonesia in 2015. Speaking at a local think tank, Erdoğan declared that positive relations between Indonesia and Turkey were beneficial for the whole world, especially given the two countries' geopolitical status, Indonesia being the 'leading country in Asia-Pacific' and Turkey simply 'the key country in Eurasia'.¹⁶ One of course needs to take into account the setting of this statement and the probability that Erdoğan used diplomatic language to flatter his host (in realistic terms it would be far-fetched to qualify Indonesia as the leading country in the Asia-Pacific region). Still, such a statement is embedded in the overall discourse and reiterates the theme of Turkey as a bridge between regions, while simultaneously illustrating the flexibility of geopolitical concepts and references to certain countries being the 'leader' or 'centre' of their region.

Especially with reference to Turkey's dual identity and position on both the European and Asian continents, Abdullah Gül explained that from Turkey's point of view 'Europe and Asia constitute one land mass, which we call "Eurasia"' and thus 'Turkey is located at the very core of Eurasia'.¹⁷ What is more, as Gül stated in his first speech as president before the Turkish parliament in 2007, 'our central position in the Eurasian geography [...] constitutes [one of] the fundamental axes of Turkish foreign policy' in addition to a strong alignment with the US and the EU accession process.¹⁸ This then obviously has direct consequences in that Turkey's position at the centre of Eurasia brings with it certain responsibilities and provides Turkey with the opportunity to take on a stronger role in regional and even global politics. In this context, in a speech on the occasion of Europe Day in 2009, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu claimed:

Turkey with its geopolitical position at the centre of Eurasia brings peace not only to the EU and to our neighboring regions such as the Caucasus, the Balkans, Central Asia, and the Middle East but also to the global system.¹⁹

¹⁶ Erdoğan 2015a

¹⁷ Gül 2003b

¹⁸ Gül 2007

¹⁹ Davutoğlu 2009a

As we have seen, the country's governing elite considers Turkey's geography to be an advantage rather than a handicap when it comes to Turkish foreign policy. Its geopolitical position is one of the bases for Turkey's growing role in global affairs, as Erdoğan claimed in a speech at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York in 2004: 'The position that Turkey occupies in the wider sense, at the heart of the Eurasian geography, will assume greater importance on the East-West and North-South axis'.²⁰ Similarly, speaking several years later at the Turkish think tank USAK, Erdoğan reiterated the link between Turkey's geography and its subsequent prominent role in global affairs. He declared that Turkey's history, vast accumulation of culture, as well as its geographical position offer the country 'inimitable opportunities and attribute to us very important missions' and that thanks to 'its unique position between regions and continents' Turkey has 'great strategic importance'.²¹ According to Erdoğan, all these characteristics make Turkey 'an effective actor, not an ordinary one'.²² Turkey is thus characterised as a pivotal country due to its multidimensional geography and history.

One of the key architects of this vision, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu, discursively positions Turkey as a key global actor by stating that Turkey's 'geostrategic location in the midst of a vast geography [...] places us in a position to relate to and influence the developments that are key to the future of the world'.²³ As a result, Turkey becomes an active player in its environment, including in Eurasia. Speaking at the Ambassadors' Conference of Ukraine in 2012, Davutoğlu compared Turkey and Ukraine as two countries having a 'multidimensional geography' and thus great strategic advantages in the international system. He went on to reject the Huntingtonian notion of Turkey (and Ukraine) being torn countries, struggling between their eastern and western identities, instead emphasising the two countries' importance: 'we are pivotal countries which will shape East and West, Europe and Asia, and we will not be shaped as a passive actor'. Davutoğlu then concluded his speech with the strong exclamation that Turkey and Ukraine 'will be shaping Eurasia

²⁰ Erdoğan 2004

²¹ Erdoğan 2010a

²² Erdoğan 2010a

²³ Davutoğlu 2012a

again and again'.²⁴ Here, the Turkish foreign minister again refers to his geopolitical vision which is based on the importance of a country's historical experience and geographical location.

The argument about Turkey's centrality in Eurasia is further augmented by the idea that due to this centrality, Turkey also acts as a bridge and link between continents, regions and cultures.²⁵ The bridge metaphor is not a new element of Turkish foreign policy under the AKP. As we have seen above, the charismatic former Prime Minister and President Turgut Özal strongly promoted the image of Turkey as a bridge and effectively opened up new realms for Turkish foreign policy.²⁶ There are two elements regarding the geopolitical concept of bridge country in Turkish elite discourse. On the one hand, Turkey is characterised as a bridge and connector between geographical regions. In an interview with *Foreign Affairs* magazine in 2013, Gül stated that 'Turkey is a bridge between Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and the Caucasus'.²⁷ On the other hand, and this is contingent upon the geographical bridge metaphor, Turkey acts as a bridge between cultures and a facilitator for the dialogue between civilisations. A good example of this is the Alliance of Civilisations (AoC) initiative, which Turkey co-sponsored with Spain under UN auspices (and which will be discussed in more detail below), with the aim to contribute to and foster better dialogue and mutual understanding between different cultures and religions. In a televised interview in 2007, Erdoğan stated that 'Turkey is a very important bridge between different cultures and civilizations' after having described the country's special geography spanning several regions and continents.²⁸ Likewise, this viewpoint is also used by Turkey's leader to promote Turkey as an important country on the international stage. Speaking at the UN general assembly in 2007, and promoting Turkey's candidacy for a non-permanent seat in the UN security council, Erdoğan made the argument that Turkey is ideally suited to facilitate dialogue between cultures because 'with its European and Asian identity, [Turkey] can assume a distinctive and constructive role in harmonizing and reconciling differing views'.²⁹ Interestingly, the

²⁴ Davutoğlu 2012c

²⁵ For a detailed discussion of the 'bridge metaphor' in Turkish discourse, see also Yanik 2009.

²⁶ Aras and Gorener 2010: 80

²⁷ Gül 2013

²⁸ Erdoğan 2007b

²⁹ Erdoğan 2007d

way in which AKP government officials adopted the bridge discourse in their foreign policy evolved over the years. As Yanik argues, after the AKP came to power, the bridge metaphor in Turkey's geopolitical vision changed from the dominant reading of Turkey bridging continents, which was prevalent in the 1990s, to one of Turkey bridging civilisations, which became more important in the 2000s.³⁰ In contrast to Özal's vision, who interpreted Turkey's bridge character as the promotion of Western values to the East,³¹ the AKP government interpreted the bridge metaphor as Turkey having multiple regional belongings and multiple identities.

The bridge discourse is also closely linked to Eurasia. Especially in the 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkish officials promoted stronger engagement with and foreign policy activism towards the Central Asian states. Turkey's role as a bridge from Europe to these newly independent countries and as a model for development was the key component of the discourse. In this geopolitical context, Turkey functions as a bridge, especially with regard to Eurasia, as former President Demirel argued: 'Eurasia has come into being, [and Turkey] has become a bridge between Europe and Eurasia'.³² During these years, the geographical dimension of the bridge discourse was prevalent.³³ Furthermore, it also served an instrumental purpose in demonstrating Turkey's strategic importance to the EU in that Turkey acted as a 'door to Eurasia'.³⁴

As argued above, under the AKP government the bridge metaphor evolved and also comprised cultural and civilisational connotations. For instance, in a speech at a Chinese university in 2009, Foreign Minister Gül said that 'by virtue of its geographic location at the heart of Eurasia and its close historical and cultural ties across a vast landscape, it acts as a crucial catalyst for enhancing dialogue and interaction between cultures'.³⁵ Several years later, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu made an almost identical statement underlining the combination of geographical, historical and cultural factors in supporting Turkey's active foreign policy. In his speech, Davutoğlu argued that one

³⁰ Yanik 2009: 538-539

³¹ Aras and Gorener 2010: 80

³² Quoted in Yanik 2009: 538

³³ Yanik 2009: 538

³⁴ Erşen 2013: 29

³⁵ Gül 2009a

of the goals of Turkish foreign policy was ‘to reconcile the West with the East and the North with the South’ and that furthermore ‘Turkey takes both the advantage of its geographic disposition and close historical and cultural ties across a vast landscape promoting dialogue and interaction between civilizations at the heart of Eurasia and Africa’.³⁶ With Davutoğlu’s definition and reference to his ‘Afro-Eurasia’ concept, Turkey’s geographical reach in this regard and thus its arena for foreign policy activism is enlarged even further. In these statements, we once again see the importance of geography in the discourse on Eurasia of Turkey’s governing elite. However, we also see how the combination of different elements forms an overarching discourse. While geography provides the basis for Turkey’s role in Eurasia, its historical experience and resulting cultural links across the region further add legitimacy to Ankara’s perceived role as a key player in Eurasia. The next section will thus take a closer look at the elements of history and culture in Turkey’s Eurasian discourse.

6.1.2 History/Culture

Turkey’s historical experience is dominated by the fact that it was at the centre of the Ottoman Empire for many centuries. The Ottoman Empire was a geographically contiguous entity spanning lands principally in Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. At its very core was what is today the Republic of Turkey. As discussed earlier, this experience as imperial centre and the Ottoman legacy is one of the ‘structural determinants’ of Turkish foreign policy.³⁷ Speaking at the Brookings Institution in 2013, Prime Minister Erdoğan emphasised this point by declaring that ‘the Republic of Turkey was built on the foundations of an old and rich civilization’. He furthermore insisted on the critical importance of this factor for Turkey’s stance on a variety of foreign policy issues: ‘the reflexes of Turkey with respect to emerging regional and global issues is based on this historic heritage and experience’.³⁸ Hence, the historical experience of being at the centre of a regional empire and the concomitant links which have been forged to a variety of regions and cultures have a lasting impact on Turkish foreign policy.

³⁶ Davutoğlu 2014a

³⁷ Aydın 1999

³⁸ Erdoğan 2013

While the geographical spread of the Ottoman Empire was vast, it never extended its reach deep into what was considered the Eurasian heartland. The competition from the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union was too strong to make this possible. While there was an attempt by pan-Turkists in the late 19th and early 20th century to connect with the Turkic communities in Central Asia, this opening failed with the eventual break-up of the Ottoman Empire, following its defeat in the First World War, and later the ideology and ideas of Pan-Turkism moved to the margins.³⁹ However, the central idea of close historical, cultural and ethnic links between Turkey and the Turkic republics remained vivid and is represented in the idea of the ‘Turkic World’ which ‘corresponds to the belief in cultural, societal, economic, and political unity among the Turkic-speaking peoples of Eurasia’.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Turkish officials refer to historical links when speaking about the importance of Eurasia, and above all Central Asia, in Turkish foreign policy. In the 1990s, Turkey attempted an opening towards these countries.⁴¹ Referring to a shared history and cultural and linguistic ties with the Turkic peoples of Central Asia, Ankara presented itself as a ‘big brother’ to these countries, facilitating their integration into the global system.⁴² Prime Minister Demirel, in office from 1991 to 1993, for instance promoted the idea of a Turkic world, or put differently, a common Eurasian community.⁴³

Later generations of politicians also considered these links to be important and saw Turkey’s potential for fostering close ties to the Turkic republics in Eurasia. For example, during his 2003 annual speech before the Turkish Parliament, President Gül declared that ‘close historical and cultural bonds with Central Asia constitute one of the pillars of our Eurasian vision’.⁴⁴ He goes on to state that Turkey was among the first countries to reach out to the newly independent states in Central Asia and that it aims to help these countries integrate into the global community of states. A prominent think tank analyst echoed this sentiment by arguing that Turkey’s position at the centre of Eurasia was not only based on a geopolitical understanding, but also a cultural one.⁴⁵

³⁹ Fidan 2010: 111. See also Landau 1988

⁴⁰ Köstem 2017: 723

⁴¹ Fidan 2010: 112-114

⁴² Aras 2002: 1-2

⁴³ Bozdağlioğlu 2003: 98

⁴⁴ Gül 2003c

⁴⁵ Interview with think tank analyst, Ankara, 18 February 2015

The importance attached by Turkey to the Eurasian region is thus also justified by strong cultural and linguistic bonds.

Furthermore, these close bonds are also linked to general issues in Eurasia such as security and stability. As President Sezer stated in a speech in front of the Turkish parliament, ‘the establishment of stability and security in Central Asia is a must for the security of Eurasia’.⁴⁶ It becomes clear that the perceived and accentuated cultural closeness to the countries of Central Asia and across Eurasia also lies on a pragmatic foundation. Turkey obviously is interested in inhabiting a stable and secure environment in which business and trade can thrive. In this context, highlighting cultural closeness can be considered an advantage in reaching such aims since it establishes a direct link between Ankara and Central Asia. A senior Turkish diplomat, for instance, argued that Turkey and the EU should cooperate more deeply on Central Asia in order to offer these countries a third alternative next to Russia and China and thus pulling the region into the Western orbit.⁴⁷ Similar considerations in the 1990s led to the establishment of the Turkish development agency (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency, TIKA). This organisation was originally exclusively set up to provide a framework for engaging the post-Soviet Turkic states on the basis of shared historical and cultural links and as an initiative to integrate them into the global system.⁴⁸ This illustrates the utilisation of cultural and historical images in Turkish discourse for pragmatic political reasons as well.

The above discussion revealed the importance of geography in Turkish foreign policy discourse. But geography and history are often mentioned in tandem, influencing and building upon each other. Davutoğlu is a particularly vivid promoter of this conception as illustrated by his strategic depth doctrine. The main tenets of the strategic depth doctrine are the importance of ‘historical depth’, which is defined as ‘a characteristic of a country that is “at the epicentre of [historical] events”’ often implying that the country was once part of an empire, and ‘geographic depth’ which is a function of ‘historical depth’ and refers to the past and present geographic spread of a country.⁴⁹ However, Davutoğlu’s approach is not new. Former Foreign Minister Ismail Cem, for

⁴⁶ Sezer 2003

⁴⁷ Interview with Turkish diplomat, Ankara, 10 March 2015

⁴⁸ Fidan 2010: 112-113

⁴⁹ Murinson 2006: 951

instance, argued that ‘the much-delayed introduction of the “historical dimension” to our geo-strategy is what I consider as my modest contribution to Turkish foreign policy’.⁵⁰ So, already before Davutoğlu, this concept gained entry into Turkish foreign policy. Cem reiterated this statement by saying:

I stated for the first time on a governmental platform that “...Turkey is an Asian country, as well as European”. We developed the concept of “Historical Geography” and the strategic value that it has in our relations with countries that make part of this geography.⁵¹

Comparing this statement to subsequent arguments made by political figures such as Gül and particularly Davutoğlu demonstrates some sort of cohesion in Turkish foreign policy since the 1990s. It is evident that factors such as Turkey’s geographical position as well as its historical and cultural ties across a vast landmass remain foundational principles of the country’s foreign policy.

In the context of the discussion of historical and cultural factors in Turkish government discourse, a key characteristic is Turkey’s perceived central place on the Eurasian landmass. In a lecture at Northwest University in China, Abdullah Gül mentioned Turkey’s crucial mediating role in global politics as a promoter of dialogue, a position Turkey only occupies ‘by virtue of its geographic location at the heart of Eurasia and its close historical and cultural ties across a vast landscape’.⁵² However, there is no specification as to which concrete historical and cultural ties reference is being made to. The same goes for a more recent statement made by President Erdoğan during a visit to Moscow in September 2015.⁵³ The Turkish President had travelled to Russia to attend the inauguration of the newly rebuilt central mosque in Moscow. Erdoğan referred to the two countries as ‘the two old cultures of Eurasia’ while speaking broadly about the benefits of closer cooperation between Russia and Turkey and highlighting the countries’ historical experiences as homeland to a wide number of cultures, religions and civilisations.⁵⁴ The message he intended to convey was that

⁵⁰ Cem 2001: 49

⁵¹ Cem 2001: 221

⁵² Gül 2009a

⁵³ The visit took place only a week before Russia started its military intervention on behalf of the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in the Syrian war, a subsequently highly contentious issue between Russia and Turkey.

⁵⁴ Erdoğan 2015b

cooperation between two countries with different religions, sharing a common neighbourhood on the Eurasian continent, would be positive for the world in general. Here again we come back to geographically infused arguments about Turkey as both a central country and a bridge country in the vast Eurasian region.

In general, it seems that Turkey's governing elite wants to put emphasis on Turkey's hybrid identity and cultural diversity as a crucial advantage in its foreign policy. Time and again, Turkish officials emphasise this point, like Prime Minister Erdoğan in a speech at a Turkish think tank where he emphasised Turkey's strategic importance while linking it to the country's 'accumulation of civilization, culture and policy'.⁵⁵ Similarly, various Turkish analysts argue that this characterisation of Turkey also has an instrumental logic for Turkish foreign policy, be it as a strategic value for the West (both EU and NATO), as a connection to Eurasia or for economic purposes in gaining access to new markets and energy-rich states.⁵⁶ As the above discussion demonstrated, the image of Turkey as a 'bridge between different cultures and civilizations' is sustained and represents the single-most important idea with regard to the cultural aspect in Turkey's Eurasian discourses.⁵⁷

The concept of civilisation has moved to the forefront of Turkey's geopolitical imagination since the AKP came to power in 2002, with both Erdoğan and Davutoğlu as chief promoters of this concept.⁵⁸ Their vision of Turkish foreign policy is underscored by a civilisational geopolitics approach, which divides the world into different civilisational blocs on the basis of their respective history and culture. In their view, Turkey is considered to be at the centre of its own civilisational basin which is distinct from the Western/European basin.⁵⁹ As Bilgin and Bilgic argue, this new civilisational discourse of the AKP government also has ramifications for Turkish foreign policy towards Eurasia because the Turkic countries in this region are seen as culturally and historically close and thus part of the Turkish-led civilisation.⁶⁰ In this sense, Turkey thus adopts the role of a leader within the Eurasian region. Ultimately,

⁵⁵ Erdoğan 2010a

⁵⁶ Interview with former Turkish diplomat and think tank analyst, Ankara, 5 February 2015; Interview with think tank analyst, Ankara, 6 February 2015

⁵⁷ Erdoğan 2007b

⁵⁸ Yeşiltaş 2014: 44; Ardiç 2014

⁵⁹ Bilgin and Bilgic 2011

⁶⁰ Bilgin and Bilgic 2011

Turkey's civilisational discourse aims at positioning Turkey as a central and influential state in global affairs (or at the very least regional affairs) while contributing to the formation of a new global order.⁶¹ An important initiative in this context was Turkey's co-sponsoring, together with Spain, of the Alliance of Civilisations under the patronage of the UN. The AoC was established in 2005 with the aim to promote dialogue and foster harmony between nations and especially between religions and the Western and Islamic worlds. Turkey thus occupies the above-mentioned role of civilisational leader in the context of this initiative, officially representing the Islamic community. This is embedded in Turkey's multidimensional foreign policy as outlined by Davutoğlu when explaining the rationale behind Turkey's engagement in the AoC: 'Turkey takes both the advantage of its geographic disposition and close historical and cultural ties across a vast landscape promoting dialogue and interaction between civilizations at the heart of Eurasia and Africa'.⁶² Similarly, speaking at the second forum of the Alliance of Civilisations, which was held in Istanbul in 2009, Erdoğan extrapolates Turkey's advantages in promoting a dialogue of civilisations by using the image of the city of Istanbul:

Istanbul not only connects two continents, namely, Europe and Asia; Istanbul is not only located at the intersection of Asia, Europe and Africa; Istanbul has also its proper place in the world as a city which embraces and harmonizes cultures, civilizations, races, religions and languages in the melting pot of history.⁶³

The example of Istanbul here stands as representation of Turkey as a whole. The geographical location between continents is coupled with a civilisational understanding of Turkey's identity derived from its religion and cultural and historical experience as the leader of the Ottoman Empire. One of the core characteristics of Turkey's discourse on civilisations is the objective to avoid a clash of civilisations. In so doing, the debate around the Alliance of Civilisations is closely linked to Turkey's characterisation of its European identity, at least in historical and geographical terms in the sense that through accession to the EU, Turkey would contribute to the formation of an actual alliance of civilisations. Hence, EU membership for Turkey is instrumental and strongly linked to this civilisational discourse. As Ardiç argues, Turkey's

⁶¹ Yeşiltaş 2013: 676-679

⁶² Davutoğlu 2014a

⁶³ Erdoğan 2009

participation in the AoC thus serves a double objective of posing as the leader of its region while at the same time enhancing its prospects for EU membership.⁶⁴ On a number of occasions Erdoğan emphasised this point by declaring that Turkey's vision of the changing nature of the EU after its eventual accession would be for it to represent an alliance of civilisation instead of being the locus of a clash of civilisations.⁶⁵ Similarly, in his 2008 speech at the Munich Security Conference, Prime Minister Erdoğan insisted on the strategic utility of Turkey's accession to the EU for the latter due to Turkey's role in the dialogue of civilisations.⁶⁶

Turkey's civilisational discourse is linked to the geopolitical imagination which sees Turkey as bridging several continents and civilisations and as a leader of the Afro-Eurasian region. However, one additional important aspect needs to be mentioned in this context with regard to Turkey's European discourse. Turkey's leaders consistently stress the importance of Turkey's cultural ties across the Eurasian region, yet at the same time they also emphasise their belonging and closeness to Europe. In an interview with the US journalist Charlie Rose in 2010, Erdoğan made the following unequivocal statement: 'Turkey is part of Europe and Turkey is part of Asia as well, geographically speaking. Now culturally, if that is the interpretation, then I think there's no question that Turkey is a part of Europe'.⁶⁷ Erdoğan replied to a question about the reluctance of some EU member states to accept Turkey into the union and emphasised Ankara's unbroken determination to become a member and to continue on its European path. This is echoed by one of the interviewees, a think tank representative with close links to the foreign ministry: 'Eurasia is very important for Turkey from an international perspective, but not from a moral perspective. Europe is more important for Turkey than Eurasia, because Turkey still sees Europe as a source of modernity and democracy and creator of civilization'.⁶⁸ Similarly, in an interview with *Foreign Affairs* magazine in 2013, President Gül argued that 'from a values point of view, we are with the West', despite Turkey's position as a bridge between different

⁶⁴ Ardiç 2014

⁶⁵ Erdoğan 2007c; Erdoğan 2011

⁶⁶ Erdoğan 2008

⁶⁷ Erdoğan 2010b

⁶⁸ Interview with think tank analyst, Ankara, 18 February 2015

regions.⁶⁹ The reference being made to culture in this context refers to political culture and ‘Western’ values such as democracy and rule of law.

There is indeed an ambiguity in the discourse of Turkish officials, which see Turkey in several roles as part of Europe, as centre of Afro-Eurasia and as the leader of its civilisational basin. In the early years of Erdoğan’s reign in power, the AKP made accession to the European Union a major goal of their foreign policy and Turkey pushed for domestic reforms in the context of its EU accession bid. At the same time, Ankara promoted the image of Turkey as an ideal model of development for countries in Eurasia and the Middle East, being both a Muslim and democratic country. The same applies to the government officials’ discourse on Turkish EU membership and their country’s strategic value for Europe as the historical meeting point of several cultures and civilisations with footholds in various regions. In a speech at the Council on Foreign Relations in 2014, Erdoğan even argued that Turkey’s engagement with and experience in the Middle East was a ‘justification’ for it becoming a member of the EU.⁷⁰ Likewise, in an interview shortly after his election as president, Erdoğan claimed that one of the reasons Turkey still wanted to become a member of the EU was the fact that Turkey had the ‘important responsibility of bridging the gap between the Islamic world and the European Union’.⁷¹ Statements like these point to the fact that Turkey also hoped to gain more traction globally as an important player in world politics (the promotion of the Alliance of Civilisations being a case in point). The discourse on bridging cultures and facilitating dialogue between civilisations is further proof of this. In sum, Turkey’s Eurasian position functions as the background to its cultural diversity which in turn is actively promoted as an important strategic asset and advantage for Turkish foreign policy.

6.1.3 Energy/economy

Geography is an important factor in the context of Turkey’s foreign policy with regard to Eurasia. Likewise, geography has an influence on economic opportunities for Turkey, especially in the energy sector. In an article published in 2008, Davutoğlu wrote about the importance of energy in Turkish foreign policy and emphasised that

⁶⁹ Gül 2013

⁷⁰ Erdoğan 2014a

⁷¹ Erdoğan 2014b

the ‘proper utilization of its geography’ was a key national interest for Turkey, which essentially means ‘facilitating the transit of energy across its territory, which is central to the East-West energy corridor’.⁷² This is especially relevant given that Turkey itself does not possess any significant energy resources, but its strategic position in close distance to almost 75 percent of the world’s proven gas and oil reserves, turns it into an important player and ‘a natural energy bridge between the source countries and consumer markets’, as Davutoğlu explained in an interview with a business magazine.⁷³ Therefore, as a former Turkish diplomat argued in a recent report, Turkey has the ‘opportunity to become a crucial energy hub for Eurasia as a whole’.⁷⁴ Generally speaking, energy is an important factor in Turkey’s foreign policy and geopolitics, especially also with regard to establishing good relations with the countries in its neighbourhood while maintaining its traditional strategic western orientation.⁷⁵ Similarly, Wigen argues that energy and Turkey’s objective to become an energy corridor through which multiple pipelines run, is closely linked to Turkey’s geopolitical imagination and the officials’ discourse of Turkey as a central country with a unique geographical location at the intersection of continents.⁷⁶ It is important to note that such a discourse is also contingent upon Turkey’s domestic energy situation and concerns about energy security. Turkey holds almost no hydrocarbon reserves and is thus dependent on imports for its domestic energy consumption. Acting as a transit country or energy corridor for oil and gas from East to West, obviously also serves the purpose to cover the energy needs for its domestic consumption.

In this context, the Eurasian region occupies an important position. Following the end of the Cold War, Turkey adopted a new foreign policy approach, developing closer and better relations with its neighbours in Eurasia with the aim to ‘make Turkey an energy hub through regional energy projects’ while facilitating the transport of hydrocarbons from the region to Europe.⁷⁷ This is also emphasised by Turkey’s governing elite. Speaking at the inauguration of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline, President Sezer made the following statement: ‘Our country lies at the

⁷² Davutoğlu 2008: 91-92

⁷³ Davutoğlu 2012b

⁷⁴ Çeviköz 2016a: 27

⁷⁵ Bilgin 2010

⁷⁶ Wigen 2012

⁷⁷ Aras and Fidan 2009: 200

intersection point of energy transport routes, at the centre of Eurasia, one of the world's new strategic regions for its oil and natural gas reserves'.⁷⁸ Hence, Turkey's Eurasian geography provides it with many advantages and serves as the foundation for Turkey's aspiration to be an energy and infrastructure hub between East and West. Both President Sezer and Foreign Minister Gül use almost identical language in describing Turkey's special position and role in this regard. Speaking about the 'Eurasian dimension' of Turkish foreign policy during his annual speech at the Turkish parliament in 2005, Sezer named as one of the principal goals in this context the 'unification of Europe and Asia through the establishment of energy and transport corridors'.⁷⁹ Gül restated Turkey's ambition a year later by affirming that 'linking Europe and Asia through energy and transportation corridors and the creation of new dynamics for regional cooperation are the main tenets of our Eurasian vision'.⁸⁰

The countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus are thus a priority for Turkey not only due to the cultural and historical links and ethnic ties but also for pragmatic economic reasons. All of the countries of the Caspian littoral are energy-rich and Ankara has sought to intensify relations with these countries in order to import energy for its domestic consumption as well as to transport these resources along to Europe. As Çeviköz argues, in the AKP's interaction with this region, energy has become more important than the common Turkic heritage and as a result, engagement with the Caucasus prevails over the more remote Central Asia.⁸¹ Indeed, the South Caucasus and Azerbaijan, as a provider of energy, as well as Georgia, as transit country, are especially important regarding Turkey's energy foreign policy.⁸² One of the principal projects in this context is the BTC pipeline. This pipeline became operational in 2006 and transports oil from the shores of the Caspian Sea through Azerbaijan and Georgia to the Mediterranean port of Ceyhan in Turkey. The BTC was seen as a major link and a first step for Turkey to become a transit country for energy resources from the Caucasus and Central Asia, but also as a part of Turkey's general engagement with and its 'vision of peace, stability and economic prosperity for the region'.⁸³ As one

⁷⁸ Sezer 2006

⁷⁹ Sezer 2005

⁸⁰ Gül 2006

⁸¹ Çeviköz 2016a: 3

⁸² Aras and Akpınar 2011

⁸³ Erdoğan 2007d

think tank analyst argued, the BTC is an excellent example of Turkey's Eurasianist policies in the early 2000s which aimed at fostering good relations with the former Soviet countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus while retaining the country's traditional Western orientation.⁸⁴ Indeed, one of the principal driving forces of the BTC project was the United States who supported the construction of an alternative route, bypassing Russia, to transport energy from the Caspian Sea thus also contributing to the development of the newly independent post-Soviet states.⁸⁵ As Erdoğan himself pointed out, the BTC 'is a symbol of our close cooperation with the United States in the Eurasian region'.⁸⁶ It is interesting to note that the above statements from Turkish officials about Turkey's critical location in Eurasia with regard to energy transit routes have been made in the years 2005 and 2006 shortly after the BTC pipeline started operating in 2006. This demonstrates the need for Turkish officials to actively promote their country's strategic value as an energy hub and bridge between East and West.⁸⁷

However, in subsequent years, Turkey's energy discourse has lost some of its traction. The completion and inauguration of the BTC took place in the logic of Turkey's western orientation and close relationship with the US and the EU as well as Turkey's ambition to become an energy bridge between the East and the West. However, in the later years of the 2000s, Turkey partnered with Russia, signing a number of intergovernmental agreements with regard to energy and planning to jointly develop new gas pipelines across the Black Sea which would bring Russian gas to European and Mediterranean markets.⁸⁸ Overall, this policy was predominantly one of diversification and not re-orientation. Turkey-Russia energy relations with regard to Eurasia are complex and oscillate between cooperation and competition, which is also due to Ankara's ambition to develop into an energy hub and not merely an energy transit corridor.⁸⁹ Turkey thus continuously strives to become an energy hub between East-West and South, which will transport oil and gas from Russia, the Caspian Sea and potentially the Middle East to Europe. Turkish support for the development of

⁸⁴ Interview with think tank analyst, Ankara, 6 February 2015

⁸⁵ Morningstar 2006

⁸⁶ Erdoğan 2005

⁸⁷ Wigen 2012

⁸⁸ Kardaş 2012a: 94-96

⁸⁹ Svarin 2015

both the Trans-Anatolian gas pipeline (TANAP) as well as the Turkish Stream pipeline is a case in point. The TANAP pipeline, which would bring natural gas from Azerbaijan via Georgia to Turkey and from there onwards to Europe and which is currently being constructed, is a critical aspect of Turkey's plan to become an energy hub.⁹⁰ Likewise, the Turkish Stream project foresees the construction of a gas pipeline from Russia to Turkey across the Black Sea with the aim to supply the Turkish market as well as the European market through onward export. Hence, the central element of Turkey's energy policy is to cover domestic demand through diversified imports while developing into an energy hub at the centre of Eurasia which connects the East with the West, as outlined on the website of the Turkish Foreign Ministry:

Its unique location provides opportunities for Turkey in terms of ensuring its own energy supply security but also brings responsibility to Turkey with regard to regional energy security. [...] The goals of strengthening its position between East-West and South-North Energy Corridors and becoming an energy trade hub is thus duly reflected in its energy strategy.⁹¹

Turkish officials sustained a focus on Turkey's Eurasian geography in order to promote this vision and to claim a central role for Turkey. In a speech at the Brookings Institution in 2013, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu described his vision for Turkey in this regard with the following words: 'we want our country, our land to be a bridge of peace through energy lines from [the] Caspian to Europe'.⁹² In the context of new initiatives for economic cooperation across Eurasia, such as the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union or the Chinese One Belt, One Road project, Turkey again occupies an important position. As a former Turkish diplomat argued, this is also where Turkey's conception of Eurasia differs from Russia's and where Turkey has a clear advantage. According to him, although both countries straddle Europe and Asia, only Turkey can really fulfil the function of acting as the 'Eurasian connection' between the two, because of its European orientation and EU candidate status.⁹³ Again, diverse elements, such as Turkey's geostrategic position and the metaphor of the bridge, come together to demonstrate Turkey's position as an important country in this region. With regard to

⁹⁰ Çeviköz 2016a: 27-28

⁹¹ Turkish MFA, 'Turkey's Energy Profile and Strategy', <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkeys-energy-strategy.en.mfa>, accessed 5 October 2016.

⁹² Davutoğlu 2013b

⁹³ Interview with former Turkish diplomat and think tank analyst, Ankara, 5 February 2015

the economic dimension of the government's Eurasian discourse, the geographical theme is reiterated in describing Turkey as an important energy bridge between Europe and Asia with the ultimate aim of developing the country into an energy hub. In this context, the cultural and historical links to energy-rich Eurasian countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia are underlined to demonstrate Ankara's central role in the region.

6.2 Evolution of discourse

Geography, culture, history and energy are the key themes in Turkish government discourse on Eurasia. As the above discussion demonstrated, Turkey's centrality, its role as a bridge between regions and civilisations as well as the country's multiple regional identities are key determinant issues in Turkish foreign policy. In what follows, and based on the above discussion, this chapter traces the evolution of Turkish foreign policy discourse on Eurasia over the last fifteen years or so, starting with the first electoral victory of Erdoğan's AKP in 2002. The narrative focuses on the interaction between external events as well as domestic developments and aims to highlight the ways in which Turkey's conception of Eurasia changed as a result thereof. The following table presents a chronological and summarised version of the key events influencing Turkish foreign policy (in italics) and the dominant keywords in Turkish discourse on Eurasia during the period under study (2002-2015).

Table 6.1 Chronological description of Eurasian discourse in Turkey

Year	Keywords and key events
2002	<i>3 November: AKP wins the general elections in a landslide resulting in 66 % of the seats</i> - Eurasia as geopolitical reality - Turkic world
2003	<i>February: Opening of the Blue Stream gas pipeline connecting Russia and Turkey</i> <i>14 March: Erdoğan takes over as Prime Minister; Abdullah Gül becomes Foreign Minister.</i> - Turkey as bridge between Europe and Asia - Turkic world - Cultural and ethnic links
2004	<i>1 May: Cyprus joins the EU</i> <i>16 December: EU leaders agree to start EU accession negotiations with Turkey in 2005</i> - Turkey at heart of Eurasian geography - Bridge between East and West
2005	<i>25 May: Inauguration of BTC oil pipeline running from Azerbaijan through Georgia to Turkey</i> <i>14 July: Launch of the Alliance of Civilizations initiative</i> <i>3 October: EU and Turkey officially start membership negotiations</i> - Turkey as energy bridge - Dual European and Asian belonging
2006	- Turkey as a regional hub - Energy bridge between Europe and Asia
2007	<i>22 July: AKP wins 46.6 % of votes in general election resulting in 62 % of seats in parliament</i> <i>28 August: Abdullah Gül elected president of Turkey by the parliament</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Turkey as bridge between cultures and civilisations - Multiple regional identities - Central position in Eurasia
2008	<i>7-16 August: 5-day war between Russia and Georgia</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Geographical uniqueness - Dialogue of civilisations - Multiple regional identities
2009	<i>1 May: Davutoğlu appointed foreign minister</i> <i>10 October: Turkey and Armenia sign the Zurich Protocols to normalise relations</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Geographical uniqueness - Multiple regional identities - Civilisational leader - Cultural links
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multiple regional identities - Historical heritage
2011	<i>March: start of 'Arab Spring': mass protests against regimes in Egypt and Syria, ultimately leading to the overthrow of President Mubarak in Egypt and large-scale fighting between a coalition of rebels and government forces in Syria.</i> <i>12 June: AKP wins 49.8 % of votes in general election resulting in 59.5 % of seats in parliament</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regional leader
2012	<i>17 May: Launch of "positive agenda" programme aimed at accelerating EU-Turkey membership negotiations.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Geographical uniqueness - Multiple regional identities
2013	<i>May: Gezi Park protests in Istanbul followed by protests in other major Turkish cities</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Turkey as a bridge between regions - Regional leader
2014	<i>10 August: Erdoğan elected Turkish president with 51.8 % of the vote in the first ever popular election of the president</i> <i>1 December: Putin announces plans to build a new gas pipeline "Turkish stream" connecting Russia with Turkey under the Black Sea</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dialogue of civilisations
2015	<i>7 June: AKP loses majority in parliament after winning only 46.9 % of seats in parliament. Negotiations to form a coalition government with other parties failed.</i> <i>July: Breakdown of peace negotiations and resumption of hostilities between Turkish government and PKK</i> <i>30 September: Russia begins military intervention in Syria in support of Assad</i> <i>1 November: AKP wins majority of seats in parliament in re-run of general elections</i> <i>24 November: Turkey shoots down a Russian fighter jet over Syria</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cultural links

When the Justice and Development Party came to power in 2002, for the first time in 15 years Turkey was ruled again by a single party government. During the 1990s, Turkey was governed by several coalition and minority governments headed by various prime ministers in relatively quick succession. Turkish politics and foreign policy were thus highly instable due to these frequent changes. This was exacerbated by a grave economic crisis which peaked in 2001 and further destabilised the country. Hence, when the AKP won a comfortable majority in the 2002 general elections, the newly elected government had relative liberty in determining its own foreign policy outlook and orientation. In the first few years, Turkey's governing elite's discourse on Eurasia did not differ much from predecessor governments and politicians such as Turgut Özal and Ismail Cem. This can be explained by the fact that in the Turkish context, the concept of Eurasia only emerged in the post-Cold War world, which predetermined the vision of Turkey's governing elite. For instance, speaking at an

annual energy conference hosted in Istanbul in 2002 on the topic of how to integrate Eurasian energy markets, President Sezer stated: ‘Following the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1990 the Eurasia concept emerged as a new political, economic and geo-political reality. This new formation gave Turkey new responsibilities, added new dimensions to her role and enlarged her horizons’.⁹⁴ Among these new roles was a perceived responsibility for the development of the former Soviet republics in Central Asia, which was considered a key axis of Turkish foreign policy with regard to Eurasia. As President Gül stated in a speech at the UN General Assembly in 2003, ‘close historical and cultural bonds with Central Asia constitute one of the pillars of our Eurasian vision’.⁹⁵ However, the argument went beyond these considerations in that the post-Cold War moment was characterised by a power shift to the East and a power vacuum in Eurasia with various countries competing for influence. In this context, Turkey considered the opening up of Eurasia and the ‘transforming [of] the term “Eurasia” into a political and economic reality’, as Gül put it, as a chance for the country’s development and foreign policy.⁹⁶

The AKP’s initial foreign policy was one of continuity rather than rupture and subscribed to the traditional vectors of Turkish foreign policy.⁹⁷ The government continued to strive for Turkish membership in the European Union and attempted to improve Turkey’s standing in global affairs, goals already outlined by former Foreign Minister Cem. The basis for Turkish foreign policy under the AKP and the self-perception of Turkey’s role in global affairs was also connected to the new geography of Turkey’s position in Eurasia. As Foreign Minister Gül declared before a global audience in New York, at the Eurasia Summit in 2003: ‘The end of the Cold War has brought about a historic opportunity to reconnect Europe and Asia through the bridge of the Eurasian land mass’.⁹⁸ He then went on to speak about the repercussions of these changes and new opportunities for Turkish foreign policy. Gül argued that ‘Turkey has become a central actor, projecting substantial diplomatic, economic and military prowess towards a vast area’.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Sezer 2002

⁹⁵ Gül 2003c

⁹⁶ Gül 2003b

⁹⁷ Duran 2006: 289

⁹⁸ Gül 2003b

⁹⁹ Gül 2003b

The attitude and the vision of the AKP leadership thus demonstrate that early in the AKP's power reign, an active foreign policy was chosen. This means that on the basis of its history and its geographical position, Turkey was seeking a position of influence in different regions. The themes of Turkey's geographical uniqueness, the country's multiple regional identities and concomitant role as a bridge between regions were particularly prevalent. Indeed, as Başer argues, the initial foreign policy under the AKP government was not substantially different from previous governments, however, there was a change towards a more active and ambitious foreign policy as exemplified by the frequent use of the 'regional leader' and 'global systems collaborator' national role conceptions by Turkish officials.¹⁰⁰ Regional leadership and 'an active role in the international arena, an active role in international organizations' was indeed considered a key strategic priority for Turkish foreign policy, as Davutoğlu argued. In the same speech, he furthermore stated that 'if you want to be influential in your region, you have to be respected in the global scene' while the reverse was also true.¹⁰¹ This active stance for Turkey as a geopolitical powerbroker and influential actor was based, among others, on the country's double westwards and eastwards orientation, the EU accession process, as well as its leadership role in the Muslim world.

On the European front, major developments in 2004-2005 affected Turkish foreign policy. In December 2004, EU leaders agreed to start accession negotiations with Turkey and less than a year later, in October 2005, the negotiations officially started. During this period, which Öniş and Yilmaz call the 'Golden Age of Europeanization in Turkey', Ankara pushed for full membership in the EU and undertook numerous efforts, including domestic reforms, in order to comply with EU demands.¹⁰² The newly elected government under AKP leadership was particularly adamant in its strive for EU membership. The reform and democratisation process, which was started as part of the EU accession process, also benefited previously marginal political actors such as the AKP. This furthermore had an impact on Turkish foreign policy in that it led to a more active foreign policy with regard to the Middle East while also using soft power tools and economic measures as foreign policy instruments.¹⁰³ In this context,

¹⁰⁰ Başer 2015

¹⁰¹ Davutoğlu 2009b

¹⁰² Öniş and Yilmaz 2009: 13

¹⁰³ Müftüler-Baç 2011

the Turkish governing elite's discourse painted an image in which Turkish membership in the EU would be an advantage for the EU. In an interview with the magazine *Spiegel*, Erdoğan underlined the notion of Turkey as a bridge by stating that 'Turkey is the gateway to the east for Europe, and the gateway to Europe for the east. We have a bridging function that Europe shouldn't underestimate'.¹⁰⁴ This of course is linked to Turkey's location in Eurasia, as Prime Minister Erdoğan declared in a speech at the Council on Foreign Relations in 2004:

Turkey will most likely become a member of the European Union within a reasonable time. The position that Turkey occupies in the wider sense, at the heart of the Eurasian geography, will assume greater importance on the East-West and North-South axis in line with the common interests of the whole region.¹⁰⁵

With regard to the new opportunities in Eurasia and Turkey's links to the countries in the region, Turkey now offered the EU to act as an important connecting link to the region. As a former Turkish diplomat noted, Turkey's role in Eurasia was that of a 'conduit' between East and West, a role for which it was ideally suited due to its EU candidate status, and as a result, Turkey could maximise its strategic value for Europe if it capitalised on this Eurasian dimension.¹⁰⁶ The notion of Turkey helping the EU spread its reach into adjacent regions such as the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Middle East, is central in Turkey's European discourse. Again, the theme of Turkey as a bridge, both in terms of regional linkages as well as economic linkages related to energy, as will be shown below, were frequently invoked.

The added value Turkey perceived to be offering the EU due to its role as a gateway to Eurasia is particularly present in the energy dimension. In the years 2005 and 2006, the discourse of Turkey's ruling elite focused heavily on energy issues linked to the question of infrastructures and Turkey's role as a hub between East and West. This of course did not happen without a reason. On 25 May 2005, the BTC oil pipeline, running from Azerbaijan through Georgia to Turkey, was inaugurated ceremonially in the presence of the presidents of the three countries. This represents the highpoint in Turkey's efforts to bring oil and gas from the post-Soviet region to Europe, a key

¹⁰⁴ Erdoğan 2007a

¹⁰⁵ Erdoğan 2004

¹⁰⁶ Interview with former Turkish diplomat and think tank analyst, Ankara, 5 February 2015

component of Turkey's energy strategy of securing domestic consumption while developing into an energy hub and transit corridor between East and West. Speaking at the BTC inauguration ceremony, Turkish President Sezer called for 'making Turkey a transit country in the East-West and North-South axes' and emphasised the importance of Turkey's geographic position in fostering infrastructure and energy links in the region.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, 'linking Europe and Asia through energy and transportation corridors', was according to Foreign Minister Gül one of the 'main tenets of [Turkey's] Eurasian vision'.¹⁰⁸ The focus on energy in Turkey's discourse also served to demonstrate the importance of Turkey as a partner of the West. Repeatedly, Ankara stated that regional projects, such as the BTC, had positive repercussions far beyond Turkey for the entire Eurasian region and Europe, in particular because they would help 'reinforcing peace and stability in the region'.¹⁰⁹ As we have seen above, Turkish officials continued to maintain the strategic objective of turning their country into an energy hub, despite the lack of progress on new transcontinental pipeline projects since the inauguration of the BTC pipeline. Still, the vision of Turkey as a link between Europe and Asia and an infrastructure and energy corridor at the centre of the Eurasian geography was upheld.

At around the same time, a slight reorientation in Turkish foreign policy took place. As noted above, around 2005-2006 Turkish foreign policy shifted away from a narrow focus on Europeanisation to stronger engagement with other regions.¹¹⁰ This did not mean that Turkey abandoned its strive for membership in the EU, but that the European axis was no longer the only centre of attention of Turkish foreign policy. Indeed, the discourse of Turkey's governmental elite reflects this shift. The July 2007 general elections in Turkey preceded this development. The AKP emerged as the clear winner from the elections garnering 46.6 percent of the vote and thus a clear majority of seats in the parliament. Abdullah Gül, until then foreign minister, was elected to be the new president of Turkey shortly afterwards. Thus empowered, the AKP government grew more assertive, leading to a reformulation of Turkish foreign policy and a considerably enlarged foreign policy vision.

¹⁰⁷ Sezer 2006

¹⁰⁸ Gül 2006

¹⁰⁹ Gül 2005

¹¹⁰ Öniş and Yilmaz 2009

Ankara aimed at playing a bigger role in global politics, notably by improving its relations with and increasing its influence in the regional neighbourhood. The Middle East in particular started to occupy a more central role in Turkish foreign policy. This was due to Turkey's new-found geopolitical identity as a central country in the international system, and consequently as a member of many regional subsystems, as well as economic considerations, such as Turkey's diversification of its trade activities and investments in new markets.¹¹¹ However, the Eurasian geography was still considered to be a central factor given that Gül declared Turkey's 'central position in the Eurasian geography' as an inherent factor and influence of Turkish foreign policy.¹¹² Furthermore, as argued above, stronger involvement in the Middle East was also related to Ankara's relationship with Europe in that Turkey could act as a link between Europe and the region thus demonstrating Turkey's strategic value.¹¹³ Hence, Turkey's involvement in what used to be part of the Ottoman Empire was thus part of the general foreign policy goal of establishing Turkey as an important actor in regional and global politics on the basis of the country's strategic geographical location and cultural diversity. On the same note, Erdoğan brought all these points together when mentioning that due to Turkey's geography which spans not only East and West but also South to the Middle East, Turkey acted as a 'very important bridge between different cultures and civilizations'.¹¹⁴

However, for a short interval, Eurasia, and above all the Caucasus, moved to the centre of Turkish foreign policy attention in the years 2008-2009, due to both external as well as internal events. In the course of this period, Turkey attempted to position itself as a major force for peace in the Eurasian region. In August 2008, the short war between Russia and Georgia over the break-away territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia destabilised the entire Caucasus and led Turkey to pursue a new strategy of promoting its role as stabiliser of the region. In response to the war, Turkey proposed the establishment of the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform (CSCP) as a confidence-building measure and as a forum for dialogue which would serve to facilitate communication between the countries of the region.¹¹⁵ In general, and as the

¹¹¹ Dal 2012: 254; Altunışık and Martin 2011: 578-580.

¹¹² Gül 2007

¹¹³ Dal 2012: 251

¹¹⁴ Erdoğan 2007b

¹¹⁵ Babacan 2008c

CSCP initiative demonstrates, Larrabee argues that the five-day war was important in pushing Turkey to adopt a more pro-active stance towards the Caucasus in order to prevent further destabilisation of the region.¹¹⁶ Turkey recognised that due to its position at the centre of Eurasia, the Caucasus was a region it could not neglect. President Gül clearly emphasised this point in a speech at the International Strategic Research Organization in Ankara in 2009: ‘The security and stability in [the] Caucasus are important to all of us. If stability is not established in the Caucasus, the Caucasus is like a wall which separates the East and the West’.¹¹⁷ Mentioning Turkey’s efforts in solving regional conflicts, including the ones in the Caucasus, Gül underlined the special capacity of his country which, due to ‘its close historical and cultural ties across a vast landscape, it acts as a crucial catalyst for enhancing dialogue and interaction between cultures’.¹¹⁸ Hence, Turkey tried to capitalise on its historical heritage in the Eurasian region in order to position itself as an important regional promoter of peace.

With regard to the importance of the region for Turkey, Babacan made the following statement in a speech at the Council of Foreign Relations, shortly after the end of the August war between Russia and Georgia in 2008:

To many academicians who study geopolitics, the diverse regions surrounding Turkey are all fascinating case studies. For us, they are a fact of daily life where, unfortunately, there is never a dull moment. The Caucasus, the Balkans, the Middle East, Central Asia, North Africa; these are all regions with their distinct dynamics and intractable issues. This is why Turkish foreign policy is endeavoring to find feasible solutions to the many regional disputes and frozen conflicts we are faced with.¹¹⁹

This statement illustrates Turkish officials’ perception of the supposedly intractable influence of geopolitics on Turkish foreign policy. Once again it is shown how Turkey’s geographical position is seen as a determinant factor leaving Ankara no other choice than to be an active peace broker and influential player in the region. As a result, and according to Davutoğlu, ‘Turkey with its geopolitical position at the centre of

¹¹⁶ Larrabee 2011: 106

¹¹⁷ Gül 2009b

¹¹⁸ Gül 2009a

¹¹⁹ Babacan 2008d

Eurasia' acts as an important force for peace in the Caucasus and in all of Turkey's neighbouring regions.¹²⁰

In May 2009, Erdoğan appointed his chief advisor, the academic Ahmet Davutoğlu as foreign minister. His ideas and writings had influenced Turkish foreign policy since the AKP came to power. As we have seen earlier, the new foreign minister introduced a slight change of meaning with regard to the government discourse on Eurasia. According to Davutoğlu, 'Turkey is in a unique position in geopolitical terms, in the midst of Afro-Eurasia'.¹²¹ Focusing on Turkey's neighbouring regions and the former Ottoman lands, a new dimension to Turkey's Eurasian identity was thus added. In a policy brief published by Davutoğlu in 2014, the foreign minister explained that 'Turkey used to be known as a Eurasian state, but for the past five to six years we have been calling ourselves an "Afro-Eurasian state", because we are at the center of the mainland of all human history'.¹²² This definition of Afro-Eurasia goes beyond the traditional Eurasian region inhabited by Turkic peoples and includes also the former Ottoman lands in the Middle East and North Africa. As Davutoğlu argued in a previous article in 2008, 'Turkey holds an optimal place in the sense that it is both an Asian and European country and is also close to Africa through the Eastern Mediterranean'.¹²³ This essentially defines Turkey as having multiple identities through its links to multiple geographical regions. As outlined in his strategic depth doctrine, which stipulates that countries have both geographical and historical depth, Davutoğlu promotes the idea of Turkey having a central position in global affairs.¹²⁴

Two aspects are particularly relevant with regard to this new focus in Turkey's Eurasian discourse. On the one hand, it signifies a shift away from a narrow definition of Eurasia based on Turkey's interaction with the Turkic republics in Central Asia to a stronger interaction with the Middle East and what essentially were formerly the lands of the Ottoman Empire. On the other hand, the new focus on Afro-Eurasia gives Turkey a somewhat larger space for action and thus elevates its status in the global

¹²⁰ Davutoğlu 2009a

¹²¹ Davutoğlu 2012a

¹²² Davutoğlu 2014: 19

¹²³ Davutoğlu 2008: 78

¹²⁴ See Murinson 2006 and Walker 2007 for a discussion of the strategic depth doctrine.

system as an important regional and even global player (due to the strategic importance of the region it inhabits).

This change of tone is also reflected in the discourses of the Turkish government elite. In the years following Davutoğlu's appointment as foreign minister, the discourse on Eurasia became more diluted. We can observe an expansion of the meaning of Eurasia with Davutoğlu's Afro-Eurasia concept as well as a general trend to merely emphasise Turkey's strategic geopolitical location and concomitant policy to pursue its interests in a variety of regions. Indeed, as Prime Minister Erdoğan explained in an article written for *Project Syndicate* in 2010:

Turkey's posture – looking both East and West – is neither paradoxical nor inconsistent. On the contrary, Turkey's multidimensional geopolitical position is an asset for the region. There are few countries that can play such a critical role. Turkey constitutes a new synthesis because of its ability to link such diverse qualities and backgrounds. Turkey is thus capable of overcoming the dichotomies of East-West, Europe-Middle East, and North-South.¹²⁵

In this context, another element decreased the importance of Eurasia in Turkish elite discourse. Under the AKP government and especially following the major electoral win in 2007, Turkey's engagement with the Middle East became stronger, which even provoked debates about a 'Middle Easternization' of Turkish foreign policy.¹²⁶ Indeed, on the basis of its Muslim identity, Ankara sought to reconnect with its neighbours in former Ottoman lands and expand its influence in the Middle East.¹²⁷ Under Davutoğlu, the focus was on civilisational geopolitics, moving the country's Islamic heritage and its Ottoman historical experience to the centre of Turkish foreign policy, thus naturally leading to more involvement in the Middle East.¹²⁸ The gradual shift towards deeper engagement with and interest in the Middle East became even stronger in the years 2010 and especially in 2011, triggered by what was generally called the Arab Spring. As a result, Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East became more interventionist.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Erdoğan 2010c

¹²⁶ Oğuzlu 2008

¹²⁷ Stein 2014: 88

¹²⁸ Erşen 2014b; Yeşiltaş 2013

¹²⁹ Stein 2014: 91

The general elections in Turkey on 12 June 2011, in which the AKP won a resounding victory with 49.8 percent of votes, helped cement this foreign policy course. As Parlar Dal argues, the large number of votes obtained by the AKP can also be read as a reward for the government and as the result of a positive assessment of the latter's regional foreign policy activism by the electorate.¹³⁰ Indeed, as discussed earlier, the place of the Middle East in Turkey's foreign policy had been growing ever since the AKP came to power in 2002. Gradually, the interest in and engagement with the region became stronger and reached a new dimension in 2011. The combination of a decisive election victory by the ruling AKP, as well as the turmoil in the region following the events of the Arab Spring, proved to be an important cocktail in fostering Turkey's Middle Eastern foreign policy.¹³¹ In the early months of the Arab Spring, Davutoğlu stated that:

If we fail to understand that there is a need to reconnect societies, communities, tribes and ethnicities in our region, we will lose the momentum of history. Our future is our sense of common destiny. All of us in the region have a common destiny.¹³²

Turkey's governing elite strongly identified with the claims and principles of the protest movements in the surrounding countries. Their call for democracy and freedom from dictatorship resonated in Turkey and prompted the government to promote a vision of Turkey as a big brother, supporter and role model to these countries.¹³³ The Arab Spring thus offered Turkey a unique opportunity to implement its new foreign policy and to become a regional leader.¹³⁴ As Stein argues, Turkish foreign policy became more interventionist along the lines of Davutoğlu's geopolitical ideas and his strategic depth doctrine.¹³⁵ As a result, starting in 2011, the government discourse on Eurasia lost much of its weight due to the strong focus on the Middle East. However, despite Turkey's initial support for the emerging protest movements in Egypt and Syria as well as its determination to contribute to regime change in Syria, Robins argues that

¹³⁰ Parlar Dal 2012: 253

¹³¹ Parlar Dal 2012

¹³² Davutoğlu 2011

¹³³ Parlar Dal and Erşen 2014: 269-271. The authors argue, however, that Turkey preferred to refer to itself as an inspiration for these countries rather than a model.

¹³⁴ This hopeful stance is nicely illustrated in the article by Aras and Akarçeşme (2012), who at the time worked for the Turkish foreign ministry think tank SAM-Center for Strategic Research.

¹³⁵ Stein 2014: 91

the Arab Spring, and especially the situation in Syria, have proven that Turkey's orientation towards the Middle East and claim of becoming a leader in the region were premature.¹³⁶ Having become too embroiled in the domestic affairs of some of the countries of the Middle East, which had negative consequences for Turkey's influence in the region, the limits of Turkey's vision as a dominant regional power became apparent.¹³⁷

During this episode, Turkey nonetheless occasionally turned towards its traditional Western orientation and the discourse again focused on Turkey's image as a bridge and indispensable part in East-West relations. When pressed in an interview in 2010 about Turkey-EU relations, Erdoğan also had the need to emphasise that from a cultural point of view there was no doubt Turkey belonged to Europe.¹³⁸ In this period, the EU Commissioner for Enlargement and the Turkish Minister of EU Affairs also jointly launched the "positive agenda" programme in May 2012, which aimed at accelerating EU-Turkey membership negotiations. Hence, the emphasis was put on Turkey's cultural alignment with Western values such as democracy and rule of law in order to demonstrate the continued relevance of Turkey to the West. President Gül, in an interview with *Foreign Affairs* magazine in 2013, argued that:

Turkey is a bridge between Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and the Caucasus. Each of our neighboring countries has a different government and administrative style. In Turkey, we have a vast majority-Muslim population along with democracy, human rights, and a free-market economy, and this makes us unique in the region. From a geographic and geopolitical point of view, Turkey belongs to this region, and we have historical relations with all our neighbors. But from a values point of view, we are with the West. If we look at the future, it's almost a mathematical fact that the world's economic and power balance will shift toward Asia. So politics must shift, too. The United States and Europe must start recognizing Turkey and its importance. And Turkey must become more important for them.¹³⁹

This statement neatly summarises how, despite Turkey's stance as self-declared leader in the region in the context of the Arab Spring, the orientation of Turkish foreign policy once again became more global. Furthermore, it illustrates the various interlinked

¹³⁶ Robins 2013: 397

¹³⁷ Öniş 2014

¹³⁸ Erdoğan 2010b

¹³⁹ Gül 2013

elements of Turkey's discourse such as the country's unique and central geopolitical position between continents and concomitant belonging to various regions and the strategic value it derives from this characteristic, including in its relations with its traditional partners in the West. The governing elite in Ankara even argued that Europe's and the EU's global geopolitical relevance were dependent on their capacity to include Turkey among its own, as Davutoğlu argued in a speech at the LSE in 2013: 'If Europe wants to be geo-politically relevant, it should have access to Asia, should have access to Middle East, should have access to Caspian Sea, Indian Sea and even Africa. They need Turkey'.¹⁴⁰ What is more, Erdoğan also claimed that Turkey had a particular responsibility as a promoter of dialogue between civilisations in 'bridging the gap between the Islamic world and the European Union'.¹⁴¹ In these instances, Turkey moved the focus again on its geostrategic location between regions and civilisations. In so doing, Turkey was presented as a model and leader for the Muslim world and a crucial actor not just in regional but also global politics.

Ankara's relations with the EU in the 2010s proved to be complex and frustrating for both sides. Turkey's perception of the EU stalling accession negotiations and treating Turkey unfairly, combined with the rejection of Turkish membership by some EU member states' leaders, led to a decisive decline in Turkey's desire to join the EU, both among the government as well as the population,¹⁴² and thus to an emancipation of Turkish foreign policy from its traditional Western/European outlook. The increasingly antagonistic relations with its Western partners, such as the EU, was paired with a growing instability in Turkey's regional neighbourhood, especially in Syria. These years thus proved complicated for Turkish foreign policy. While in the preceding decade, Turkish foreign policy was guided by a number of clearly defined principles, such as Davutoğlu's 'zero problems with neighbours policy', regional developments and the turmoil in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, effectively rendered

¹⁴⁰ Davutoğlu 2013a

¹⁴¹ Erdoğan 2014b

¹⁴² According to the Eurobarometer public opinion polls, popular support for Turkey's EU membership (respondents who thought EU membership would be 'a good thing' for Turkey) dropped from over 50 percent in the years 2005-2007, to under 50 percent between 2008 and 2010, to between 30 and 40 percent after 2011 (see European Commission, Public Opinion, available at <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Chart/getChart/themeKy/3/groupKy/312>, accessed 30 November 2016).

these principles as well as Turkey's quest for regional leadership somewhat obsolete.¹⁴³

Given the above described political events in its neighbourhood, Turkey's concerns in the years 2014 and 2015 were focused less on Eurasia. Following these developments, the governing elite's discourse on Eurasia, focusing on Turkey as a bridge, an energy corridor or promoter of dialogue between East and West, became all but absent in Turkey. Even supposedly prime opportunities to present Turkey's geostrategic value in a positive light were missed. For instance, when Turkey and Russia announced in December 2014 that they were planning to build Turkish Stream (and subsequently signed a memorandum of understanding to this effect), a new gas pipeline connecting Russia with Turkey under the Black Sea, Turkish government discourse remained silent about the potential strategic value of such a project for Turkey and for Turkey's position in the region. In earlier years, Turkey's location at the centre of Eurasia, and the role it thus played as a major energy hub, was frequently highlighted as a crucial element of Turkish foreign policy and its role in Eurasia. Arguably, the absence of prominent mentions of this project was due in part to Turkey's reluctance to go ahead with the Turkish Stream project in the first place,¹⁴⁴ but it was also indicative of a larger shift in Ankara's geopolitical imagination in which Turkey's role as a bridge, or in this case a corridor, had been replaced by Turkey as a central country and regional powerhouse.

Especially the continuing civil war in Syria and its increasing spill-over into Turkey, with a large influx of refugees, but also the rise of the so-called Islamic State and terrorist activities on Turkish soil, demanded much attention. The intrinsic nexus between domestic politics and the regional environment, which was present since the Arab Spring, remained a central concern and bound many resources. Eurasia as a previously important arena for Turkish foreign policy moved to the background. At the same time, the civil war in neighbouring Syria escalated with Russia's decision to intervene militarily in support of Syrian President Bashar al Assad in September 2015. The situation got even more complicated when Turkey, after repeated violations of its airspace by Russian fighter jets, shot down a Russian jet in late November, leading to

¹⁴³ Öniş 2014

¹⁴⁴ Demirtaş 2015

a breakdown of hitherto cooperative relations between Russia and Turkey. The events taking place in Turkey's region and their implications for domestic politics, dominated the perception of Turkey's leaders. Turkish foreign policy and Ankara's geopolitical imagination remained heavily focused on the country's immediate neighbourhood. Given the turmoil in Turkey's neighbouring countries and the general security predicament in the wider region, Ankara had almost no other option than to adopt a reactive, rather than a proactive stance, in its foreign policy.¹⁴⁵

Hence, the joint challenges of Turkey's regional environment and its domestic politics acted as a brake on its foreign policy vision of becoming a regional leader and important actor globally. In large part as a result of failed policies and decisions in response to the Arab Spring, Turkish foreign policy was in shambles.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, the domestic instability due to terrorist activities, repeat elections and the renewal of fighting between the government and the PKK in the summer of 2015 absorbed much attention and resources. While the general mindset of Turkish foreign policy, as defined by Davutoğlu and discussed above, was still present, it was less reflected upon in the governing elite's discourse. A rare exception was the statement by President Erdoğan before the Turkish parliament in October 2015. While maintaining Turkey's ambition to join the EU, Erdoğan reiterated the importance of Turkey's location and the shared history and culture with this region as a guiding principle of its foreign policy. Speaking about the 'brothers and sisters' in Syria, Iraq, as well as 'in the Balkans, Central Asia, North Africa, Africa and other regions of Asia', the Turkish President insisted on the importance of 'our common history, cultural proximity, civilization partnership and the humane values we share with these brothers and sisters'.¹⁴⁷ This statement should of course be read in the context of the ongoing crisis and civil war in Syria with its repercussions on Turkey, but it nonetheless demonstrated that the underlying vision of Turkey as a country with multiple identities was still present. However, in contrast to the early years of the AKP leadership, when there were frequent references to Turkey's central country status, its role as a bridge between continents and civilisations and as the centre of the Afro-Eurasian landmass, in more recent years, since around 2013-2014, this discourse lost a lot of traction, mainly due

¹⁴⁵ Güney and Mandaci 2013: 444

¹⁴⁶ Kuru 2015

¹⁴⁷ Erdoğan 2015c

to the political turmoil in the region. Still, the references to and perception of Turkey as being a part of Eurasia remained. On two occasions in 2015, during a speech in Indonesia and a visit in Moscow, President Erdoğan made general references to Turkey as a key Eurasian country and as one of the old cultures in Eurasia.¹⁴⁸ These statements need of course to be read in their respective contexts to properly assess their value. Still, despite the described re-orientation of Turkish foreign policy and the expansion of Turkey's geopolitical realm to Afro-Eurasia, the concept of Eurasia did not disappear entirely from Turkey's geopolitical imagination.

6.3 Synthesis

The aim of this chapter was to analyse the importance of Eurasia for Turkey and the way in which Turkey's governing elite attributes meaning to the Eurasian 'geopolitical space'. Through a close reading of discourses by members of this governing elite, several central themes have been identified. Geographical, historical, cultural and economic characteristics are the central features of Turkish foreign policy discourse with regard to Eurasia.

Geography is the dominant theme in Turkish government discourse on Eurasia. At the heart of this discourse are Turkey's belonging to both Europe and Asia, its centrality in the Eurasian region (or in Davutoğlu's words, Afro-Eurasia) as well as its position at the intersection of different regions. Indeed, Turkey sits neatly between continents and acts as a link between them. This idea of Turkey as a bridge is an important element in the government discourse.¹⁴⁹ In this sense, Turkey is almost the quintessential Eurasian country because it regroups on its territory the geographical, historical and cultural links across Eurasia. In general, the idea of Turkey being a central country, also with regard to Eurasia, is an important theme in Turkey's government discourse. On the basis of its centrality in Eurasia, Turkey also acts as a bridge and link between continents, regions and cultures.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Erdoğan 2015a; Erdoğan 2015b

¹⁴⁹ Yanik 2009

¹⁵⁰ See also Yanik 2009 for a detailed discussion of the 'bridge metaphor' in Turkish discourse.

While geography provides the basis for Turkey's role in Eurasia, its historical experience and resulting cultural links across the region further add legitimacy to Ankara's perceived role as a key player in Eurasia. In general, the historical experience of being at the centre of a regional empire and the concomitant links which have been forged to a variety of regions and cultures had a lasting impact on Turkish foreign policy. Turkish officials refer to historical links when speaking about the importance of Eurasia, and above all Central Asia, in Turkish foreign policy. For instance, it is argued that Turkey's position at the centre of Eurasia was not only based on a geopolitical understanding, but also a cultural one and the importance being attached to the Eurasian region is thus also justified by strong cultural and linguistic bonds.¹⁵¹ Turkey's perceived central place on the Eurasian landmass is a key characteristic when discussing historical and cultural factors in Turkish government discourse. Turkey's governing elite puts emphasis on Turkey's hybrid identity and cultural diversity as a crucial advantage in its foreign policy. As such, the image of Turkey as a 'bridge between different cultures and civilizations' is sustained and represents the single-most important idea with regard to the cultural aspect in Turkey's Eurasian discourses.¹⁵² Furthermore, Turkey's Eurasian position functions as the background to its cultural diversity which in turn is actively promoted as an important strategic asset and advantage for Turkish foreign policy.

When it comes to the theme of economy in Turkish government discourse, energy is the dominant factor in Turkey's foreign policy and geopolitics. Having to respond to an increasing domestic need for energy while at the same time maintaining the goal to become a transit country or energy corridor for oil and gas from East to West are the central issues. In this context, the Eurasian region occupies an important position. Following the end of the Cold War, Turkey adopted a new foreign policy approach, developing closer and better relations with its neighbours in Eurasia. Energy was at the centre of such efforts and according to President Gül, 'linking Europe and Asia through energy and transportation corridors and the creation of new dynamics for regional cooperation are the main tenets of [Turkey's] Eurasian vision'.¹⁵³ However, this discourse has considerably weakened after 2005/2006 (when the BTC pipeline

¹⁵¹ Interview with think tank analyst, Ankara, 18 February 2015

¹⁵² Erdoğan 2007b

¹⁵³ Gül 2006

was completed). Still, the central element of Turkey's energy policy is to cover domestic demand through diversified imports while developing into an energy hub at the centre of Eurasia thus connecting the East with the West. With regard to the economic dimension of the government's Eurasian discourse, the geographical theme is reiterated in describing Turkey as an important energy bridge between Europe and Asia with the ultimate aim of developing the country into an energy hub. In this context, the cultural and historical links to energy-rich Eurasian countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia are underlined to demonstrate Ankara's central role in the region.

The time period under study in this chapter ranges from the year 2002, when the AKP came to power in Turkey, to the end of 2015. Although the concept of Eurasia is a recurring feature in Turkish government discourse over this period, the discourse on Eurasia evolved both in terms of the meaning of Eurasia as well as its importance for Ankara.

In the early years of the AKP rule, more or less overlapping with the first electoral term from 2002 to 2007, Eurasia repeatedly entered the Turkish government discourse. Foreign Minister Gül can be considered a promoter of the idea that Turkey is a Eurasian country. However, this should not be read as an ideological discourse but rather as a pragmatic assessment of Turkey's interests and opportunities. In general, it can be argued that pragmatic considerations are the key element in the discourses of Turkey's governing elite on Eurasia. As such, many discursive elements actually serve concrete foreign policy objectives. For instance, the bridge metaphor which was frequently used to illustrate Turkey's role as a bridge between regions and civilisations, served to demonstrate Turkey's importance in global politics and above all as a partner for the West and the EU. Hence, the start of membership negotiations between the EU and Turkey in 2005 was accompanied by an emphasis in Turkish discourses on Turkey being an indispensable partner for the EU for the latter to spread its reach and influence globally. Likewise, the focus on civilisational aspects in Turkish discourse follows a similar logic in that it aims to showcase Turkey as a pivotal country in its own geopolitical space, which Davutoğlu called Afro-Eurasia, and an

important actor in regional and global politics.¹⁵⁴ During these years, Turkey was divided between its traditional Western orientation, resting on pillars such as NATO membership and the aim to join the EU, and an increased focus on its neighbourhood and geography with which it had historical and cultural links dating back to the era of the Ottoman Empire. Due to both domestic and international developments, a shift from a Europe and Eurasia-centric to a Middle East-centric discourse can be observed.

On the domestic front, the major development contributing to this trend was the continued and uninterrupted domination of Turkish politics by the AKP. Having won every single general election since 2002, allowing it to rule the country single-handedly without forming a coalition with another political party, the AKP and its Prime Minister Erdoğan grew much more assertive. While at first, they continued the country's traditional orientation towards Europe, over the years this changed. Coming from a conservative and Islamist background, the Middle East and generally Muslim countries in its neighbourhood became more central in Turkish foreign policy. Secondly, the increasing weight and role played by Ahmet Davutoğlu, the architect of the AKP's foreign policy vision, also contributed to this development. Hence the shift from a discourse focusing on Eurasia to one focusing on Afro-Eurasia.

In addition to these domestic trends, the external environment played an important part in the shift in Turkish foreign policy discourse. Growing opposition among some members of the EU, above all France (during Sarkozy's presidency) and Germany, to Turkish membership somewhat weakened Turkey's motivation and drive to join the European club. But also the tumultuous changes in the Middle East, starting with the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and reaching a new level with the outbreak of the Arab Spring in 2011 and concomitant civil war in Syria, prompted Turkey to focus more strongly on its unstable neighbourhood. With regard to the key Eurasian countries, the Turkic republics in Central Asia, Ankara quickly realised that it lacked the power to compete against a resurgent Russia for influence in the latter's backyard.

Interestingly, all these developments led to a narrowing of Turkey's foreign policy potential in that its influence and reach was challenged both on its Western and Eastern

¹⁵⁴ Ardiç 2014: 116-118

side. At the same time, given its comparatively powerful position in its own neighbourhood, as a stable and prosperous Muslim country, Turkey's leaders constantly portrayed their country as a pivotal actor in regional and global politics. In so doing, Turkey's reach extended even beyond the traditional Eurasian and Afro-Eurasian realm. In this context, Turkish officials characterised Turkey as both a central country and as a bridge and there seems to be some ambiguity between these two metaphors. As a central country, Turkey attempts to evolve into a regional leader and important actor in the global system, while as a bridge, Turkey utilises its geographic location and cultural identity to bridge continents and civilisations. These two concepts do not necessarily need to be in contradiction to each other. For instance, as a country, Turkey is not a bridge between regions, but as the leader of its civilisational basin, Turkey becomes a bridge between civilisations. Nevertheless, under Davutoğlu's rule, the Turkish bridge identity has moved to the background while concepts such as Turkey as a regional leader and global actor have moved to the forefront.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, Başer's study on the evolution of national role conceptions in Turkish foreign policy nicely illustrates how the 'bridge' role was dominant from 2003 to 2008 before being replaced by the 'regional leader' role around 2008.¹⁵⁶

Despite a trend towards a refocusing of Turkish foreign policy on the MENA region, the idea of Eurasia has not been abandoned completely. With direct references to its geostrategic location and concomitant importance of Turkey as a global actor, which over the years and due to the crisis in its neighbourhood actually increased, Turkey still sees value in a focus on Eurasia. What changed was Turkey's own agency in the process. Having realised that it lacked the power to influence the development of a Eurasian vector, Ankara saw strength in its position in-between different regions and cultures. As a former Turkish ambassador put it in a personal interview:

Eurasia cannot be a potential new orientation for Turkey. Eurasia is a concept. Turkey cannot create Eurasia, but Turkey would like to see the creation of Eurasia. If the chips come down to where we belong, we belong to the West. There's no doubt on that. But that is not our full interest. We want to keep our Janus face: we cannot deny

¹⁵⁵ Arkan and Kinacıoğlu 2016: 394

¹⁵⁶ Başer 2015: 297

or detach ourselves from our Asian properties and we don't want to neither.¹⁵⁷

In sum, the key elements of Turkish government discourse on Eurasia are an overarching focus on the country's geopolitical situation sitting at the intersection of various regions. Having strong links to each of these regions and being open to both East and West, Turkey is characterised as a pivotal country in global affairs. The concomitant discourse is anchored in references to historical links based on Turkey's Ottoman heritage, its cultural and linguistic closeness with the Turkic republics in Eurasia and pragmatic economic considerations of being an energy and infrastructure hub connecting East and West and North and South. Turkey thus situates itself as the crucial piece in the formation of an interconnected Eurasia.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with former Turkish diplomat and think tank analyst, Ankara, 5 February 2015

Chapter 7: Eurasia and the meaning of ‘geopolitical space’

This chapter offers a synthesis of the observations and discussions in previous chapters. It starts by offering an analysis of the place of Eurasia in Russian and Turkish discourse on the basis of the theoretical framework – the triangular relationship between geopolitical imagination, foreign policy and national identity – as outlined in Chapter 2 and expands upon a discussion of four factors which define the function of Eurasia in Russian and Turkish discourse. In a second step, despite not being a comparative research, the similarities and divergences between the Russian and Turkish conception of Eurasia are briefly discussed in order to draw some general observations. Given that Eurasia does not evolve in a vacuum, the final part of this chapter analyses challenges to the Eurasia concept. These include other geopolitical discourses and orientations in Russian and Turkish foreign policy.

7.1 Eurasia in Russian and Turkish foreign policy

This research is based on a theoretical framework at the centre of which stands the triangular relationship between national identity, geopolitical imagination and foreign policy. This framework postulates that a country’s foreign policy is equally influenced by the governing elite’s geopolitical imagination as well as their perception of the country’s national identity. However, foreign policy options and external events also influence the elite’s understanding of their country’s identity as well as their geopolitical imagination. Through an analysis of the governing elite’s foreign policy discourse, I aim to uncover the place of Eurasia in Russian and Turkish foreign policy. Whereas the previous chapters focused on an analytical and chronological description of the principal themes in Russian and Turkish discourse (such as the country’s geographical location at the centre of Eurasia or the manifold cultural and historical links across the Eurasian space), this chapter is interested in understanding how the concept of Eurasia is linked to the Russian and Turkish governing elites’ understanding of their country’s place in the global system. In order to do so, I identified four factors which relate to the function the concept of Eurasia occupies in Russian and Turkish foreign policy. These four factors are power, identity, role and opportunity.

The way in which these factors should be used in interpreting foreign policy is outlined by the following questions. First, it is important to analyse whether the discourse on Eurasia is related to the issue of *power*, namely Russia and Turkey as important regional or great powers. The second question refers to the way in which Eurasia is characterised as an inherent part of the country's national *identity* or not. Third, this study is also interested in whether the discourse on Eurasia is a pragmatic discourse that evolves around the notion of political and economic *opportunities*. And, fourth, it analyses whether Russia and Turkey speak about Eurasia in a way which defines their respective *role* in the international system. From the outset it can be stated that the issues of power and role, the two obviously being connected, are at the centre of both country's discourse on Eurasia.

7.1.1 Russia

In general, Russia's status as a leading global power is a key component of the way in which Russia's governing elite regards their country's role in the international system. This is combined with a strong discourse emphasising the importance of establishing a multipolar (polycentric) order and opposition against a unipolar world order. Within this understanding, Russia takes on the role of a great power which balances the power of other states, and thus contributes to a stable and equal global order. The 2013 foreign policy concept refers to 'the unique role our country [Russia] has been playing over centuries as a counterbalance in international affairs and the development of global civilization'.¹ Time and again, Russia's governing elite emphasised this notion while also arguing that the 21st century was characterised by the development of a new multipolar order. Indeed, as Lavrov argued in a keynote speech on Russian foreign policy in 2012, 'we see ourselves and really are one of the centers of the new polycentric world'.² President Putin further elaborated on this notion early on in his third term in office in a prominent speech at the Valdai Discussion Club forum: 'The 21st century promises to become the century of major changes, the era of the formation of major geopolitical zones, as well as financial and economic, cultural, civilisational, and military and political areas'.³ The notion of geopolitical zones or Russia as centre of the polycentric world are central to understanding the geopolitical imagination of

¹ Russian Federation 2013

² Lavrov 2012

³ Putin 2013

Russia's governing elite. What is more, these notions are also tied up with Russia's geographical position and understanding as the key Eurasian country.

Going back to Putin's 2013 speech at the Valdai Club, we can see how the President's geopolitical imagination ties together the existence of a multipolar order with global political developments and Russia's position in Eurasia. In the second part of the quote, Putin goes on to argue that integration with other post-Soviet states is crucial in this context and that the Eurasian Union was a project helping to maintain 'the identity of nations in the historical Eurasian space in a new century and in a new world', eventually leading to the formation of a Eurasian geopolitical zone.⁴ In combination with the above cited understanding of Russia as a counterbalance in the international system as well as the continued competition between Russia and the West which increased following the Ukraine crisis in 2013, we can see how Russia's political leadership perceives the international system. What they see is a system of competition between different geopolitical zones, Eurasia being one of them.

Hence, Russia's role in global affairs (as a great power and influential actor) is inherently tied to Eurasia. Putin made this clear in his inauguration speech, when he argued that Russia's political survival and relevance in global affairs was connected to its role as the leader of Eurasia: 'We must all understand that the life of our future generations and our prospects as a country and nation depend on our ability to become a leader and centre of gravity for the whole of Eurasia'.⁵ This quote is key to understanding the place of Eurasia in Russia's geopolitical imagination and how it is tied to Russia's governing elite's understanding of their country's place and role in the international system. As we can see, this was a rather recent development which started principally with Putin's return to the presidency in 2012, and then took a new turn in the wake of the Ukraine crisis starting in 2013. While Russia always considered its role to be that of a great power and influential actor in global affairs, it also attempted to integrate with Euro-Atlantic security structures in the early 2000s, sought to build Greater Europe while at the same time also creating a new community of like-minded

⁴ Putin 2013. Similarly, Krickovic (2014) argues that regional integration is a strategy for maintaining Russia's powerful role in a changing and uncertain international system.

⁵ Putin 2012b

states in its environment. In recent years, a reinforced geopolitical imagination emerged in which Russia truly became the creator of a new Eurasia.

In this reading, Eurasia is being developed as an independent centre for global development standing between the West/Euro-Atlantic and the East/Asia-Pacific. Through this development, Russia also takes on an additional role, namely that of a link between the East and West, considering itself to be representative of both worlds. The prime mechanism through which this should take place is the EAEU, acting as a connector between the regional integration mechanism in the West, such as the EU, and the emerging regional order in the East under Chinese leadership. This role, which Russia takes on in the context of regional integration within Eurasia, also helps consolidate Russia's position as the hegemon in Eurasia, and in consequence, as a global great power. Russian efforts to harmonise its Eurasian union project with the Chinese OBOR initiative is a case in point in that Russia attempts to utilise its position in Eurasia to support China's move to the West, while gaining a stake in these developments at the same time.⁶ This tripartite understanding of the world in which Eurasia co-exists as an independent global centre next to the Euro-Atlantic and Asia-Pacific region is not new to Russia's geopolitical imagination.⁷ However, with the establishment of the EAEU, Russia now has an institutional vehicle to promote its leadership in the region while also remaining open to cooperation with integration mechanisms in the West, such as the EU, as well as actors in the East, such as China. Hence, Eurasia is an inherent part of the Russian governing elites' understanding of their country's role in the international system as a global power and as a link between the East and West.

As we have seen above, Eurasia is a key component in Russia's role perception. This is closely linked to the issue of power, namely Russia as the regional hegemon and a global great power. In this sense, Russia's Eurasian location and Eurasian identity are linked to the country's future development. As such, Eurasia is considered to be the centre of Russian power and the place where Russia's principal economic interests and its future political development are grounded. The establishment of the Eurasian

⁶ As we have seen above, according to Wilson, Russia was the driving force behind the agreement on harmonisation of the EAEU and OBOR signed in May 2015 (Wilson 2016: 119).

⁷ Svarin 2016

Economic Union serves as the foundation which sustains Russia's position in this regard.

In general, in the Russian case, Eurasia as a geopolitical concept is constructed in order to justify Russia's quest for regional leadership and its global power ambitions. Hence, in conjunction with discourses on Russia's imperial past and its vast geographical spread (covering the Eurasian territory), Russia emphasised the importance of Eurasia as a region in which it has privileged interests as well as special relations with other countries from the region and in which it does not want to see the influence of other actors. Hence, Eurasia as a geopolitical space becomes a typical geopolitical concept where the notions of competition and influence are crucial. Similarly, with the establishment of the EAEU and especially the cooperation with the Chinese OBOR initiative, Russia also fosters an image of itself as a crucial actor which connects regions and opens up new spaces for cooperation and economic development. This has the added benefit of portraying Russia as an indispensable actor in the process. Hence, the Eurasian discourse is clearly linked to Russia's great power discourse.

In the preceding discussion of the discourse of Russia's governing elite, it has become apparent that members of this elite mostly refrained from clearly defining Russia's national identity in terms of a geographical belonging. Russia thus claims to be European, not just historically, but also culturally, as well as Asian, although mostly based on a geographical reading, and thus uniting different identities on its territory. In this context, Eurasia is a central aspect as the meeting point of Europe and Asia. While Eurasia is more than just Russia, Russia's governing elite embraces their country's Eurasian identity. For example, the claim that the Russian language is the natural language in Eurasia, or in Putin's words, 'the language of interethnic communication for the numerous ethnic groups of the Eurasian continent',⁸ demonstrates the intrinsic link between Russia and the Eurasian space. Similarly, the notion of a 'civilisational commonality' between Russia and the other post-Soviet countries highlights the joint Eurasian identity which is formed on the basis of a common historical experience in Eurasia and the concomitant links Russia developed with other countries in the region.

⁸ Putin 2015c

With the development of Eurasian integration and the eventual establishment of the EAEU, the discourse on identity gained an additional quality. As President Putin claimed in his 2013 speech at the Valdai Discussion Club, ‘the Eurasian Union is a project for maintaining the identity of nations in the historical Eurasian space in a new century and in a new world’.⁹ The focus thus not only lies on economic integration but also on fostering the pre-existing cultural and historical ties among the Eurasian countries in order to maintain those links for the future development of the region. With the Eurasian integration project, specific values are being attached to this Eurasian identity and to the countries participating in the EAEU. According to Tsygankov, these values consist of the promotion of ‘state-centered national unity, traditional religious ties, and respect for cross-cultural relations, and sovereignty/non-interference from large powers in the region’.¹⁰ In general, according to Lukin, these values, and the values of post-Soviet states in general, differ quite strongly from the West.¹¹ Through such values, the Eurasian space is also being characterised as a distinct and independent entity. This helps foster the image of Russia as an independent power, on the basis of its position as the key country in the region. This development is amplified by the Ukraine crisis because Russia moved even further away from Europe and the West and, as a result, the country’s Eurasian identity and the importance of Eurasian values, became much stronger.¹²

Eurasia as a pragmatic discourse, evolving around the notion of political and economic opportunities, seems to be less relevant in the Russian case because in any case Russia considers itself to be a great power with global reach and with interests everywhere. In combination with the perception of Russia’s role as a link between East and West, the Eurasian location obviously also offers opportunities to develop Russia’s economy. In this context, it is only natural that Russia’s governing elite considers Eurasia to be full of opportunities. In the early 2010s, for instance, Eurasia and Russia’s Eurasian location were considered to be a crucial component and an important advantage in Russia’s pivot to the East and Asia in particular. In this vision, it is essentially Russia’s Eurasian identity and its Eurasian geography which serves as the premise for Russian

⁹ Putin 2013

¹⁰ Tsygankov 2016c: 251

¹¹ Lukin 2014b

¹² Trenin 2015a

actions in Asia. This became especially prevalent in the context of Medvedev's presidency and his modernisation programme, as illustrated in a speech at the Valdai Discussion Club early on in his presidency. Medvedev argued that calling Russia a Eurasian country had important 'practical implications' for the country's development and that ultimately, 'without diversifying the country's development to the East, our economy has no future'.¹³ The fact that Russia is a Eurasian country thus stretches its economic opportunities in both directions to the East and the West.

Furthermore, Eurasia as Russia's backyard is linked to Russia's position as a global great power with global reach and interests. In that sense, Eurasia and the newly established EAEU offer Russia the opportunity to develop its 'own geopolitical zone' which in turn forms the basis of its great power status. At the same time, it also cements Russia's status as an independent centre of power between the Euro-Atlantic and the Asia-Pacific regions. And, finally, through the implementation of the EAEU, a regional cooperation mechanism, Russia can face the EU on eye-level and potentially conclude new deals on a multilateral level from one cooperation mechanism to another. Hence, Russia's power is augmented and diversified by the EAEU and in that sense, Eurasia is an opportunity for Russia to institutionalise its power. In addition, and this is an important point, the EAEU also serves to secure the strong political and economic links which currently exist between Russia and the other member-states in the long run, somewhat shielding them from current and potentially changing political realities.¹⁴

7.1.2 Turkey

The AKP government's geopolitical vision, especially under the influence of Foreign (and later Prime) Minister Davutoğlu, conceptualised Turkey as an important country and regional power within its own geopolitical sphere. Referring to its geographically strategic position 'at the centre of Afro-Eurasia', Davutoğlu highlighted Turkey's 'geographical uniqueness' through which it became an actor in all of its surrounding regions. As a result of this position, Turkey had the chance to become 'a really important player in world politics'.¹⁵ Hence, Turkey's role in the international system

¹³ Medvedev 2008c

¹⁴ Pozo 2017: 172

¹⁵ Davutoğlu 2009b

is that of an important player and as a power broker, both of which is related to its Eurasian location. Or, as Cohen argued, 'Turkey's role as a regional power has taken on global dimensions as it has begun to exploit its pivotal location within Eurasia'.¹⁶ Furthermore, on the basis of this geostrategic location, Turkey also has the potential to act as a bridge or connecting agent between different regions and, according to Cohen, Turkey thus 'can become a key balancing agent within the world geopolitical system'.¹⁷

Exponents of Turkey's governing elite equally emphasised this point and promoted the image of Turkey as a gateway between different regions. Given the country's traditional Western orientation, exemplified by Turkey's NATO membership and its sustained quest for membership in the EU, Turkey's role as a gateway for the West to the East is particularly prevalent. What is more, such a geopolitical characterisation of Turkey also underlines the country's potential and regional power. For instance, in a speech in 2013, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu argued that the EU needed Turkey in order to retain its global geopolitical relevance because only Turkey could provide the EU with access to the geopolitically important regions in its neighbourhood.¹⁸ Indeed, as a former Turkish diplomat argued, Turkey plays the unique role of acting as a Eurasian connection for the West, given the country's geographical location as well as its historical European orientation and status (at least officially) as a prospective EU member state.¹⁹

What is more, given the strong emphasis on the notion of civilisation in world politics in Turkish foreign policy under the AKP, the idea of Turkey not only as a gateway but also a bridge or promoter of dialogue between cultures and civilisations is prevalent in Turkish discourse. Turkey thus acts as the leader of its own civilisation. In that role, Turkey promotes dialogue and interaction between civilisations, while retaining a Western orientation, which facilitates and to some extent justifies this role.²⁰ Speaking at the UN general assembly in 2007, for instance, Prime Minister Erdoğan argued that 'with its European and Asian identity, [Turkey] can assume a distinctive and

¹⁶ Cohen 2011: 217

¹⁷ Cohen 2011: 218

¹⁸ Davutoğlu 2013a

¹⁹ Interview with former Turkish diplomat and think tank analyst, Ankara, 5 February 2015

²⁰ Yeşiltaş 2013

constructive role in harmonizing and reconciling differing views'.²¹ Hence, the notion of Eurasia is important in characterisations of Turkey as a promoter of dialogue globally and thus as a contributor to a stable and peaceful global environment. Similarly, Foreign Ministers Gül and Davutoğlu successively noted Turkey's position at the 'heart of Eurasia' as a crucial element in promoting dialogue and interaction between cultures and civilisations.²² The fact that Turkey belongs to different regions and thus has different identities is a central element in the governing elite's geopolitical vision and serves to position Turkey as a power broker. This allows Turkey to play the role of facilitator and connector between regions and civilisations and thus ultimately to become a crucial actor in global affairs.

In the Turkish case, it seems that Eurasia, as a geopolitical concept, was constructed in order to justify the country's quest for regional leadership. Hence, in conjunction with discourses on its imperial past and geographical location, Turkey emphasised the importance of Eurasia as a region in which it occupies a special position and entertains special relations with other countries from the region. As such, the Eurasian discourse is an extension of attempts to position Turkey as the regional hegemon and leader in the region of the former Ottoman Empire. At the same time, there is a strong emphasis on the notion of Turkey as a bridge between regions and civilisations, further illustrating the country's importance in global affairs. For instance, Prime Minister Erdoğan argued in 2004 that Turkey was an important country and would become even more important, merely because of its geographical location in Eurasia: 'The position that Turkey occupies in the wider sense, at the heart of the Eurasian geography, will assume greater importance on the East-West and North-South axis'.²³ The way in which Turkey draws power from its Eurasian location is thus simply as a country that has important links to all these regions and that furthermore serves as a connector and mediator between them. In addition, positioning itself as a model for other countries in the wider region (especially for the Central Asian republics) and as the West's permanent and most important link to the Eurasian region while upholding the continuous discourse on EU membership, Turkey defines itself as a crucial actor.

²¹ Erdoğan 2007d

²² Gül 2009a; Davutoğlu 2014a

²³ Erdoğan 2004

Due to its geographical location, Turkey has multiple identities, which is an important component of Turkish foreign policy in that it makes Turkey an influential actor. This viewpoint is reflected in writings by Ahmet Davutoğlu. For instance, the Turkish foreign minister argued that ‘in terms of geography, Turkey occupies a unique space’ as a result of which, Turkey ‘may be defined as a central country with multiple regional identities that cannot be reduced to one unified character’.²⁴ Under Erdoğan’s leadership and with the influence of Davutoğlu, a civilisational approach became central to the AKP’s foreign policy. This civilisational approach is key in that it also signifies that Turkey moved away from Europe to a distinct civilisation. As Bilgin and Bilgic argue, Turkey is considered to be at the centre of its own civilisational basin which is distinct from the Western/European basin.²⁵ However, as the above quote by Davutoğlu illustrates, Turkey’s governing elite nonetheless perceive their country to belong to various regions and thus have various identities. As such, Eurasia is part of Turkey’s civilisation basin, but it is not the only nor the most dominant part. This is especially relevant given that Davutoğlu defined Turkey’s new identity as being at the centre of Afro-Eurasia. Turkey’s identity thus evolved in part by enlarging the country’s geopolitical vision from Eurasia to Afro-Eurasia, a development which is also linked to a new role of Turkey as a global power with a larger reach. Indeed, as Erşen argues, Turkey’s geopolitical vision expanded, and the Middle East and North African region became more important. Still, Eurasia remained a core concept due to its inclusive nature and Turkey’s role as ‘a bridge or a passage point between many of the Eurasian sub-regions’.²⁶

As we have seen above, Turkey’s Eurasian location is linked to the role the country plays in global affairs. In addition, the potential for the country’s development and the opportunities this location offers are also important. On the basis of its Eurasian location, Turkey is characterised as a bridge, thus occupying an important function for both East and West by linking the two. This function is seen as an advantage in that it offers Turkey a direct access to new markets in its East and South while at the same time acting as a transit country for goods from these markets. Indeed, as some Turkish analysts argued, characterising Turkey in such a way is highly instrumental and

²⁴ Davutoğlu 2008: 78

²⁵ Bilgin and Bilgic 2011

²⁶ Erşen 2014a: 188

responds to an opportunistic logic in Turkish foreign policy in that it highlights Turkey's strategic value for the West (both EU and NATO) as a connection to Eurasia while also developing economic opportunities such as gaining access to new markets and energy-rich states in Eurasia and beyond.²⁷

The dominant issue with regard to the opportunities linked to Turkey's governing elite's Eurasian discourse is the issue of energy, notably Turkey as an energy hub and/or a transit country. In this context, Eurasia is a crucial notion in Turkish foreign policy in that it is almost exclusively due to Turkey's Eurasian location that Turkey becomes the perfect energy hub and gateway between East and West. This is exemplified by a statement from President Gül, who argued that 'linking Europe and Asia through energy and transportation corridors and the creation of new dynamics for regional cooperation are the main tenets of our Eurasian vision'.²⁸ It is important to note at this point that Turkey itself is highly dependent on energy imports since it only manages to generate around 26 percent of its energy demand domestically.²⁹ It thus has a strong incentive to utilise its geostrategic location in close proximity to a vast amount of the world's energy reserves to generate energy imports. However, what is more, Turkey also aims to leverage this position to become an energy hub, thereby increasing its role in the international energy trade and, as a consequence, also becoming a more powerful actor globally. Although Turkey has not yet fulfilled this potential, the former Turkish diplomat Çeviköz argues that 'its geographical location and its need for energy imports, particularly in the field of natural gas, make Turkey a key partner' and that transforming Turkey into an energy hub would be an important opportunity for the country.³⁰ Being located at the crossroads of regions, and at a strategic position in the vast Eurasia territory, thus is an important asset for Turkey.

7.1.3 Synthesis

The aim of this thesis is to uncover the meaning of Eurasia in Russian and Turkish foreign policy discourse, that is the place Eurasia occupies in these countries'

²⁷ Interview with former Turkish diplomat and think tank analyst, Ankara, 5 February 2015; Interview with think tank analyst, Ankara, 6 February 2015

²⁸ Gül 2006

²⁹ Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Turkey's Energy Profile and Strategy', available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkeys-energy-strategy.en.mfa>, accessed 3 November 2017.

³⁰ Çeviköz 2016b

geopolitical imagination. The basic tenet adopted here is that geographical space is not a fixed entity but is shaped and defined through discourse. This signifies that geopolitical spaces are being made meaningful through the discursive practices of foreign policy elites. In general, it can be noted that Eurasia serves as a flexible concept in Russian and Turkish discourse. Indeed, Eurasia is conceptualised in the geopolitical imagination of Russia's and Turkey's governing elite with reference to all of the four factors discussed above (power, role, identity and opportunity). However, most closely linked to Russia's and Turkey's Eurasian discourse are the issues of role and power, which in turn are intrinsically linked to each other. The above discussion about these four factors has demonstrated how the Russian and Turkish governing elite perceives the importance of Eurasia in their foreign policy. What at its most basic is simply a geographical location or a point on a map, becomes something much bigger and more important through the attributes attached to it by the elite's discourse.

In sum, the place of Eurasia in Russian discourse influences the way in which Russia sees its role in the international system. The basic tenet here is Russia's status as a leading global power and a pole in the multipolar order which are connected to the country's Eurasian location. As we have seen above, Russia characterises Eurasia as an independent centre of global development and itself as the leader of Eurasia. As a consequence, Russia also takes on the role of a counterbalancing force in the global system, defending a balanced (in the sense of a balance of power) and multipolar order while at the same time acting as a link between the major geopolitical zones in the West and the East. This role perception is of course intrinsically linked to the issue of power and Russia's status as a global power in the sense that Russia's power is grounded in Eurasia. In conjunction with the characterisation of Eurasia as an independent geopolitical zone, the definition of Russia as the centre of gravity for the whole of Eurasia thus leads back to Russia's position as one of the principal poles in the global system. This is also manifested by the Eurasian integration project which institutionalises Russia's power in the region and its position as hegemon, while linking it permanently to other post-Soviet states.

The place of Eurasia in Russian discourse and identity conceptions is less clearly evoked, but it is nonetheless present. There is an intrinsic link between Russia and Eurasia both historically but also through cultural aspects and especially the position

of the Russian language as the principal language in Eurasia. The issue of identity then comes to the forefront with the establishment of the EAEU which, according to Russia's governing elite, helps maintain the identity of nations in the historical Eurasian space. Furthermore, Eurasia and the EAEU are also being linked to specific values, such as an independent model of state development, the importance of sovereignty and non-interference from outside powers, which differ from values in the West but are shared by the countries in the region. Through such conceptualisations it becomes clear that Eurasia is part of Russia's identity, both historically as well as politically. What is more, Eurasia obviously also offers concrete opportunities for Russia. As the leader of Eurasia, Russia is shaping the region's development while also benefiting from the improved economic conditions derived from the workings of the EAEU. Furthermore, Russia acts as a link between East and West on the basis of its Eurasian position, which offers prime opportunities for Russia's economic development, especially also in its Far Eastern regions. Russia leverages its Eurasian position in fostering regional integration and economic cooperation through the EAEU, but also in benefiting from its location to support China's New Silk Road initiative. Hence, Eurasia offers Russia the opportunity to be a connecting link between the economically more developed West and the more dynamic and rising East.

In the Turkish case, Eurasia influences the way in which the governing elite perceives the country's role in the global system. Hence, Turkey is a central country on the basis of its Eurasian (Afro-Eurasian) location and as such is being defined as a regional power. Furthermore, it acts as a power broker in the global system through its role of a bridge or connecting link between regions and civilisations. In so doing, Turkey helps to foster dialogue between cultures but also serves as a gateway for the West, and European countries in particular, to the East. Related to this is Turkey's role as a global energy hub and a transit country for energy between East and West. All this is linked to the issue of power and Turkey as an important regional power. The Turkish governing elite characterises the country as the leader of its civilisational basin on the basis of its geostrategic location and imperial legacy, thus empowering itself to speak on behalf of the region on the global stage. In its essence, Turkey's central position, which is related to Eurasia, provides the country with manifold links to other countries and regions thus making it a powerful country on the global stage.

A key characteristic of Turkey's identity is related to its geographical situation, or put differently, its geographical uniqueness. Due to this uniqueness, Turkey has multiple identities and cannot be reduced to a single regional belonging. At the core of this vision lies the idea of Turkey as the centre of Afro-Eurasia, a rather large landmass in which Turkey occupies a prime position both in terms of geography as well as due to cultural and political links. All this is also linked to concrete opportunities, especially in the economic realm. Hence, Turkey's role as a bridge between regions offers the country access to new markets while at the same time acting as a link between these markets and the European market. At the core of this is the issue of energy and the unique opportunity offered by its Eurasian location to become a major energy hub and transit country between the producing regions to the East and South of Turkey and the consuming markets in Europe.

In short, the concept of Eurasia is a central element in Russian and Turkish government discourse. It is also an instrumental concept which serves a variety of purposes in attributing a number of different characteristics to Russian and Turkish foreign policy. Indeed, Eurasia is a flexible concept which is being shaped and re-shaped by the governing elite's discourse on the basis of changing geopolitical visions.

7.2 Comparison between Russian and Turkish discourse

The principal aim of this thesis is to analyse the meaning and place of Eurasia in Russian and Turkish government discourse. As such it is not comparative in nature, focusing on each country individually. However, given the number of similarities between Russia and Turkey, such as their Eurasian geographical location, their imperial past and concomitant ethnic, cultural and political links to other countries in the region as well as their marginal European location, it seems relevant to briefly compare their respective conceptions of Eurasia. In a first step, I will briefly look at the weight and characterisations of the principal themes (geography, culture/history, economy) in Russian and Turkish discourse. The second part then presents a brief comparison of the different role conceptions or factors (role, power, identity, opportunity).

7.2.1 The importance of the four themes in Russian and Turkish discourse

With regard to geography, both Russia and Turkey characterise their country as being at the heart of the vast Eurasian geography while belonging to both the East and the West. Especially in the case of Russia, the notion of being both European and Asian, while at the same time acting as a bridge between them, is frequently emphasised. Interestingly, both countries refer to the notion of centrality but in slightly different ways. For Russia, as the quintessential Eurasian country on the basis of its historical development, its centrality in Eurasia is key. In addition to Russia's historical experience, this is also related to the country's size and its unique geopolitical position covering a large part of Eurasia. In the case of Turkey, the central country status is also strongly emphasised, but the focus is less clearly on Eurasia given the civilisational aspect of Turkish foreign policy and the notion of Turkey as the centre of Afro-Eurasia as developed by Davutoğlu. It is this general geographical uniqueness which stands at the centre of Turkish foreign policy discourse.

With regard to history and culture there are clear similarities between the Russian and Turkish case, but also clear divergences. As such, Turkey often refers to the notion of the Turkic world and the concomitant cultural and ethnic links across Eurasia. This is related to the countries of Central Asia which share ethnic and religious ties with Turkey. Russia's governing elites, on the other hand, mostly emphasise historical and civilisational commonalities with other countries in Eurasia. Based on its historical experience as a Eurasian empire (first in the form of the Russian Empire, then the Soviet Union), Russia is the nucleus of a historic community in Eurasia. In that role, it also acts or acted as a meeting place of civilisations and cultures which are united in Eurasia and which share a number of similarities, among them the prevalence of the Russian language for instance. This common political heritage and concomitant political identity is an important aspect, especially also in the context of the future development of the region through Eurasian integration. Although Turkey uses similar notions of being a bridge between cultures and civilisations, this is less clearly related to its Eurasian geography, but more strongly to its historical legacies, imperial past and religious identity. Hence, Turkey perceives itself to be a civilisational leader and thus a promoter of dialogue between civilisations and cultures, also across the Eurasian space.

Economy is where the two cases most strongly diverge, and it is this issue which also has a determinant impact on the future development of the Eurasian discourse in Russia and Turkey. Hence, Russia's elite shaped the vision of their country as the centre of Eurasia both politically and economically through the institutionalisation of the Eurasian (Economic) Union, with Russia at its core. Although for the moment only a small number of Eurasian countries participate in the EAEU, it is nonetheless, at least discursively, one of the most important projects of Russian foreign policy in recent years. While the EAEU offers obvious economic benefits through stronger integration, it also helps Russia cement its status as leader of the region and consequently, as a pole in the multipolar world and a global great power. Furthermore, and here Russia's and Turkey's position actually come close to one another, it aims to establish Russia as a bridge between Europe and Asia, linking the two economically. This has the added benefit to assure Russia's continued relevance in Eurasia as a link and balancing actor between the economically more dynamic regions both in the East and West. For Turkey, in the economic realm, Eurasia is primarily important with regard to energy. Whereas its status as a central country also helps it develop economic ties with a large number of countries and regions, it is the energy nexus that is emphasised most strongly. Not only concerning its geographical location between energy rich countries in Eurasia and the Middle East, but also given its strong cultural and ethnic links to the Turkic republics in Central Asia, Turkey is ideally positioned to become an energy hub and transit country. Linking Europe to Asia, while improving its own standing and economic prospects as an energy hub, are central aspects of Turkish foreign policy with regard to Eurasia.

7.2.2 Comparison between Russian and Turkish role conceptions

Both Russia and Turkey perceive Eurasia as an important factor in defining their role in the global system. For Russia, its status as a global power is key, while for Turkey the fact that it is a regional power dominates. Still, given its geopolitical position, Turkey is seen as a central country whose power in the global arena is augmented because of its perceived role as a power broker and a bridge as well as a promoter of dialogue between regions and civilisations. Russia, on the other hand, as the centre and also central country of Eurasia, forms one of the poles of the multipolar order and through that role has an influential position in global affairs. In general, both countries

consider their Eurasian location an important influence in shaping their respective role as a link between East and West. For Russia, this pertains to its role as a balancing power in the tripartite global system with three principal poles of power (Euro-Atlantic, Eurasia, Asia-Pacific), while for Turkey the focus is more on making the country an indispensable actor through its linking function between Europe and the MENA region as well as the Islamic and Western civilisations.

Similarly, Eurasia is linked to Russia's and Turkey's position as powerful countries. Again, for Russia the outlook is more global, whereas for Turkey the main focus is regional, or put differently, with regard to its civilisational basin. A difference between the two cases is that for Russia, Eurasia is clearly the arena where its future development and thus the maintenance of its global power status are grounded, a fact which is underlined by the strong focus on Eurasian integration and the promotion of and establishment of the EAEU. For Turkey, on the other hand, Eurasia is less central given not only the enlarged definition of Turkey as the centre of Afro-Eurasia but also the civilisational geopolitics of the AKP government which puts the focus on civilisation, or put differently, an Islamic culture on top of its geographical centrality. Indeed, as a Turkish expert argued, Eurasia for Turkey is more of a geographical definition, but not a civilisational one.³¹

The same goes for the identity realm which seems to be more prevalent in the case of Russia than in Turkey's case. In general, identity considerations are not at the forefront of Russian and Turkish elite discourse on Eurasia. It is important to note that there is a constant emphasis on a dual or multiple identity defining each country. As such, Russia is not only considered to be a part of Europe (culturally and historically), but also of Asia (mainly due to its geography), while of course being the quintessential Eurasian country. Turkey's case is somewhat different in that Turkey is characterised as having multiple identities such as being European (in terms of values and history), but also Middle Eastern (through its culture and imperial legacy) and Eurasian (ethnic ties with Eurasian countries). Over the years, however, in the Turkish case, and especially following the arrival of Davutoğlu, this multiple identity has evolved into one overarching identity, namely that of Turkey as being at the heart of Afro-Eurasia.

³¹ Interview with think tank analyst, Ankara, 5 February 2015

This in turn signified a strong focus on Turkey's regional environment and its historically imperial hinterland in the Middle East and North Africa while highlighting the country's geographical uniqueness as a defining feature. There is also an evolution to be observed in Russia's case in the sense that the Ukraine crisis, which started in 2013, can be seen as the culminating point of a shift away from Europe to a strong focus on Eurasia. This is underlined by arguments emphasising the difference in values between Europe and Eurasia with the development of Eurasian values promoted through vehicles such as the Eurasian union.

The area in which both Russia and Turkey converge is in considering their country's respective Eurasian location as a prime opportunity for their country's economic and political development. This is a central aspect, especially in the case of Russia, which considers Eurasian integration to be a crucial element in Russia's future development. At the same time, it also offers Russia the possibility to foster better ties with other integration processes and initiatives, such as the Chinese OBOR project, but also the EU. Furthermore, providing a link between the East and the West by acting as a corridor for trade and commerce also guarantees Russia's continued importance on the Eurasian continent. The same can be said for Turkey, which focuses on its Eurasian location in order to promote the vision of Turkey as an energy hub and transit country. The emphasis on the economic opportunities and potential Eurasia offers remains relatively strong in both cases and is an important element in Russian and Turkish discourse.

7.3 Challenges to the Eurasia concept

The main focus of this thesis was the place of a single geopolitical concept, that of Eurasia, in Russian and Turkish governing elite discourse. However, in both the Russian and Turkish cases, other geopolitical concepts are also present in the respective elite's geopolitical imagination. Indeed, as argued earlier, a discourse does not evolve in a vacuum and in the case of Russia and Turkey, the discourse of Eurasia cohabited with discourses on Europe, the Middle East and other geographical regions. The aim of this section is thus to briefly focus on other geopolitical concepts. For instance, in the case of Turkey, Eurasia is just one discourse and discourses focusing on Turkey's European character or its renewed interest in the Middle East are also

dominant in the public discourse. With regard to Russia, it is essential also to focus on the discourse on Europe, the Euro-Atlantic and the Asia-Pacific.

As argued earlier, Eurasia is certainly a central geopolitical concept in Russian and Turkish discourse. Nevertheless, there is also room for other discourses. This is illustrated by a close look at the data collected for this thesis. Out of a large overall sample of collected texts and interviews, only a relatively small number was actually used in the detailed analysis presented in Chapters 5 and 6. Put differently, only a minor number of texts referred to or spoke about Eurasia. In the case of Russia, out of 288 collected speeches, interviews, articles and official documents, only 50 made directly reference to Eurasia and were thus used in the analysis. In the case of Turkey, out of 174 collected speeches, interviews and articles, only 46 texts were retained for the analysis on the basis of their references to Eurasia. Nevertheless, given that this thesis is not interested in a quantitative analysis but a qualitative analysis of the place of Eurasia in Russian and Turkish government elite discourse, this fact is not inhibiting. As illustrated above, Eurasia indeed occupies a relatively prominent and central position in Russian and Turkish discourse. Still, the presence of other geographical imaginations in Russia's and Turkey's governing elite discourse is obvious and it is these geopolitical imaginations and their potential to influence the place of Eurasia in the elite's discourse which are briefly analysed in the next section.

In the geographical imagination of Russia's governing elite, two additional geopolitical zones are present: the Euro-Atlantic and the Asia-Pacific region.³² Russia's political elite described their country as being a member of both regions, in addition to the country's Eurasian identity. However, as the following brief overview will demonstrate, the intensity of the elite's discourse is significantly weaker than with regard to Eurasia. In the case of Turkey, the governing elite also places their country as an important actor in the Middle East, and generally the region of the former Ottoman Empire, while also referring to the country's European nature and its willingness to become a full member of the European community.

³² Much of the next two sections is based on earlier work (see Svarin 2016).

7.3.1 Russia and the Euro-Atlantic

Historically, Russia and its predecessor entities were always part of Europe, or at least participated in European politics. Even during the Cold War, when the confrontation between East and West led to a division of Europe, Russia still occupied large parts of the European continent. During the 1990s and in the early 2000s, Russia indeed oriented itself towards the West and Europe. Russia's political leaders emphasised this by claiming that 'above all else Russia was, is and will, of course, be a major European power'³³ or that 'Russia has always been and remains a European power'.³⁴ Russia's identity as a European state and the country's belonging to the historical and geographical European community is presented as a given by both Russian and many European political leaders. Indeed, going back in history, Europe was the principal reference point for Russia, and the country's development was shaped along the European model. Neumann, who studied the dialectical relationship between Russia and Europe over the last two centuries, argued that 'the idea of Europe is the main "Other" in relation to which the idea of Russia is defined'.³⁵

Based on its European identity, Russia considers itself naturally to be a part of the Euro-Atlantic space. Russian discourses on the Euro-Atlantic are closely linked to Russia's approach to Europe and the long historical relationship that unites them. As such, Russia's Euro-Atlantic policy is an extension of its European identity and is considered a separate track in its foreign policy, distinct from policies towards other geographical regions. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and especially in the early 2000s, Russia's elite sought ways to integrate with and become a full member of the Euro-Atlantic community. Despite its long-standing roots in the region, the Russian Federation was a relatively new 'member' of the Euro-Atlantic region and also one that occupied a special position because it was not accepted as a full member of the Euro-Atlantic community.³⁶ The Russian debate about the Euro-Atlantic thus strongly focused on how to form an understanding between the dominant forces in the region and how to reform the Euro-Atlantic security community, which effectively meant how to better integrate Russia. For instance, speaking to students at Russia's

³³ Putin 2005

³⁴ S. Ivanov 2006

³⁵ Neumann 1996: 1; see also Neumann 2016

³⁶ See Sakwa 2017

elite university MGIMO, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov called for a change of paradigm by stating that ‘perhaps it is time to think of a new definition of Atlanticism that does not exclude Russia’.³⁷

Such a reading of Russia’s position in the Euro-Atlantic corresponds to the general Russian tendency to position itself as a major power in global politics. Having consolidated its power resources, Russia’s leaders started to see their country as one of three poles in the Euro-Atlantic power structure. Indeed, Foreign Minister Lavrov argued that ‘it wouldn’t hurt the part of the world customarily known as the Euro-Atlantic region to have a triple understanding – between the US, Russia and the European Union’.³⁸ At this point, Russia sought closer relations and integration with the Euro-Atlantic while seeing itself as one of the great powers in this space. For instance, as discussed earlier, during the Medvedev presidency, Russia also proposed a reform of the European security community in the form of the pan-European security treaty. The goal was to form a more comprehensive security regime for the entire region, preventing the further exclusion of Russia while at the same time dismantling the traditional security structures formed around NATO. By proposing new security structures to replace traditional Euro-Atlantic organisations and structures, Russia tried to assume leadership and present itself as a major great power. Positioning Russia as an equal partner in the Euro-Atlantic region at the same level as the US and the EU would give credence to Russia’s quest for great power status and influence in international politics.

However, this stance and Russia’s involvement in the Euro-Atlantic region experienced a major turn with the start of the Ukraine crisis in 2013. The relationship between Russia and the West was already fragile due to a number of factors, such as continued talks on a possible NATO enlargement in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, Russia’s war with Georgia in 2008, the launch of the EU Eastern Partnership in 2009, and a general misunderstanding about their respective role and position in global affairs. The Ukraine crisis thus signified the ultimate end of Russian ambitions to become integrated into the structures of the Euro-Atlantic space. Foreign Minister Lavrov clearly outlined Russia’s viewpoint in his speech at the UN general assembly:

³⁷ Lavrov 2007b

³⁸ Lavrov 2007b

The West has embarked upon a course towards “the vertical structuring of humanity” tailored to its own hardly inoffensive standards. After they declared victory in the Cold War and the “end of history,” the US and the EU opted for expanding the geopolitical area under their control without taking into account the balance of legitimate interests of all the people of Europe.³⁹

The discourse with regard to the Euro-Atlantic space thus took a new turn. The Ukraine crisis signified to Russia that the West was willing to sustain a geopolitical competition in Europe and, as a result, a deep partnership between Russia and the West was no longer possible. Advocating a pluralist and multipolar global order and positioning itself as a great power, Russia now rather seeks recognition as an opponent of the West or as an important strategic partner which helps maintain the global order.⁴⁰

7.3.2 Russia and the Asia-Pacific

In addition to the Euro-Atlantic space, the Asia-Pacific is a second point of reference for Russia. Stretching the European continent all the way to the far east, it is only natural that Russian leaders perceived the Asia-Pacific as an important geopolitical space for Russian foreign policy. In addition, the development of the Far Eastern Russian provinces is closely linked to forging cooperative ties with countries in the Asia-Pacific. All of this is underscored by the ‘rise of the East’ and the general tendency in global politics to perceive power shift from West to East. In this context, Russia and its political elite also developed a stronger interest in and engagement with the East. This has gained entry in the official foreign policy discourse, as for example in the 2013 foreign policy concept: ‘Strengthening Russia’s presence in the Asia-Pacific region (APR) is becoming increasingly important since Russia is an integral part of this fastest-developing geopolitical zone’.⁴¹ There is also a domestic dimension, namely the need for the development of the Russian Far Eastern regions, which are far from the Russian economic centres in the country’s West, but close to economically dynamic countries in Asia. In this context, it is important for Russia to foster strong links with countries in the region, to participate in regional initiatives and to gain memberships in regional organisations. As such, the issue of the development of the

³⁹ Lavrov 2014c

⁴⁰ See Sakwa 2017 for a detailed discussion of these developments.

⁴¹ Russian Federation 2013

Russian Far East and, more generally, its importance in Russia's policy towards the Asia-Pacific, is central in Russian discourses as well as in public debate.⁴²

Keeping in mind the underlying ambition of Russian foreign policy, namely to position Russia as a great power in global affairs, it is only natural that Russia's elite increased its attention to developments in the Asian region. Hence, Russia pursued the goal of becoming a member of regional organisations and integrating existing regional structures, which would allow it to grow a stronger presence in the region. Still, Russian leaders only recently attributed importance to the Asia-Pacific. Nevertheless, in their view, Russia moved from being a passive member of the Asia-Pacific to an active participant. Simultaneously, over the years, the discourse of Russia's leaders put more emphasis on Russia's belonging to the Asia-Pacific, and Russia evolved from being a beneficiary of the region's economic potential to a contributor to its future development. Hence, concrete issues such as economic development and security cooperation increasingly also emerged in the policy-makers' discourses.

In general, the importance of the Asian vector in Russian foreign policy is a more recent development and corresponds to the overall trend in international politics (the US for instance launched its 'pivot to the East' in 2012). Hence, stronger engagement with all countries in the Asia-Pacific and deeper integration into the region as a whole was seen as an important step for Russia in order to maintain its power. As a group of prominent Russian experts argued, 'Russia's economic and political advance into the Asia-Pacific region is a prerequisite for its internal stability and international competitiveness'.⁴³ Russia's belonging to the Asia-Pacific is justified by the country's geography and thus proximity to the region, as well as with pragmatic interests, such as promoting potential new avenues for development in the country's East. Russian interests in the Asia-Pacific are of a pragmatic nature in terms of keeping its position as a great power. According to the same Russian authors, this is important because 'only by balancing its Western and Eastern development vectors and system of foreign relations can Russia become a truly modern global power'.⁴⁴

⁴² Kuhrt 2012

⁴³ Valdai Discussion Club 2012: 5

⁴⁴ Valdai Discussion Club 2012: 5

However, Russia's involvement in Asia and the elite's discourse on the Asia-Pacific are not the most important components of Russian foreign policy. Next to Russia's historical orientation towards the West and the newfound focus on Eurasia, Asia remains a sideshow in Russian foreign policy. Nevertheless, the future development of Russia's relations with the Asia-Pacific needs to be observed. After the Ukraine crisis and the rupture with the West, most strongly exemplified by the political and economic sanctions which the US and the EU imposed on Russia, Moscow's turn to Asia and especially China became more important.⁴⁵ Economic interests, trade, the harmonisation of their respective regional initiatives (the EAEU and OBOR) and a shared reluctance towards the US' global leadership are major uniting themes. In this context, Russia's pivot to the East and its belonging to the Asia-Pacific has become a reality and the elite's discourse about the Asia-Pacific might well gain a new quality in the future.⁴⁶

7.3.3 Turkey and Europe/the West

After the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the official foundation of the Turkish republic in 1923, Turkey looked westwards and oriented itself towards Europe. The republic's founding father and first president, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, had a vision of turning Turkey into a secular and modern democracy, modelled on European values. Turkey joined Western and Euro-Atlantic institutions, such as NATO in 1953, and applied for EU membership in 1987, eventually leading to the opening of accession negotiations with the EU in 2005. Given this context, it is not surprising that Turkey's political leaders frequently emphasise their country's belonging to Europe and the West. Turkey's ambition to become a member of the EU is frequently mentioned in speeches by government officials and EU accession is characterised as the 'fundamental priority' of Turkish foreign policy.⁴⁷ Similarly, Prime Minister Erdoğan was no less adamant when he made clear in 2004, at the beginning of his tenure, the direction in which Turkey would look: 'one of the main points of departure of Turkish foreign policy is its place and membership within the structures of the Western World'.⁴⁸ In general, the Western orientation of Turkish foreign policy is clearly

⁴⁵ Trenin 2015a

⁴⁶ Lukin 2016

⁴⁷ Babacan 2008b

⁴⁸ Erdoğan 2004

emphasised, as in Abdullah Gül's speech at Ljubljana University: 'Turkey's political, cultural and economic engagement with Europe has a background of more than two centuries. And, from its inception about eighty years ago, the Turkish Republic has pursued a policy of integration with Western institutions'.⁴⁹ As a result, there is a historical continuity in this aim because, according to Gül, 'EU membership will mean anchoring more than a century old western vocation'.⁵⁰

This was the mindset of Turkey's governing elite at the beginning of their long reign in power in the early 2000s. In recent years, and increasingly since the AKP came to power, Turkey's European vocation started to be questioned – not only by European countries but also by Turkey's political elite. Due to its new, multi-dimensional foreign policy, which directed Turkey's interests increasingly also towards other regions, membership in the Western/European club has become less of a priority. Or put differently, the articulation of Turkey's European vision changed in the sense that Turkish foreign policy-makers started to depict Turkey's accession to the EU as a mutually beneficial process in which Turkey could significantly contribute to the EU's pursuit of greater influence in the world and thus 'transform the EU into a global actor'.⁵¹ As already described earlier, Turkey's European policy in these years went through two phases, from 'the golden age of Europeanization' to a 'loose Europeanization'.⁵² This development came hand in hand with the realisation that Turkey should aim at playing a bigger role in global politics, notably by developing a stronger posture in its regional neighbourhood. As a result, other regions started to become more important in Turkish foreign policy.

At the same time, Turkey's image of Europe changed. According to Macmillan, who studied the discourse of the AKP with regard to Europe:

The AKP stance reveals a much more self-confident and independent attitude towards Europe; it no longer aims for complete Europeanisation or views Europe as "the enemy" but views Europe simply as a neighbour among others, from which it can learn much but to which it also has much to teach.⁵³

⁴⁹ Gül 2004

⁵⁰ Gül 2003a

⁵¹ Babacan 2008a

⁵² Öniş and Yilmaz 2009: 13

⁵³ Macmillan 2013: 118

This illustrates the evolution in Turkish foreign policy from wanting to become a European country to being an independent country in Europe while perceiving itself as an important country that would add weight to the EU. Similarly, Oğuzlu argues that Turkey has moved away from its Westernisation approach to a ‘Turkey-centric westernism’.⁵⁴ This concept exemplifies the idea that Turkey still accepts and adopts liberal Western values, however, it does not follow them to the detriment of pragmatic interests it might have in other regions. Hence, one could speak of an emancipation of Turkish foreign policy from its traditional Western/European outlook. In this context and given the AKP’s civilisational geopolitics outlook, the region of the former Ottoman Empire, became increasingly central in Turkish foreign policy.

7.3.4 Turkey and the Middle East

Over the last decade, Turkey’s relations with the Middle East grew closer. Since the AKP’s rise to power, its Islamist background has spurred debates about Turkey’s policy towards the Middle East. Some observers spoke of the ‘rediscovery’ of the Middle East and even of a ‘Middle Easternization’ of Turkish foreign policy.⁵⁵ It is clear that Turkish foreign policy in the region has become much more active in recent years. However, this was not only due to an ideological shift but rather due to the general changes in Turkish foreign policy towards a more active and multi-vector approach. According to Turkey’s new-found geopolitical identity as a central country in the international system and, consequently, as a member of many regional subsystems, the Middle East became more important.⁵⁶

The main reasons for Turkey’s renewed interest in the Middle East were economic and civilisational concerns.⁵⁷ Admittedly, the religious background of the AKP helped foster a new image of Turkey in the Middle East and ‘led to an increase in the country’s consciousness toward a potential regional leadership role based on a new civilizational rhetoric’.⁵⁸ Indeed, as Abdullah Gül maintained in a speech in 2003, Turkey had a responsibility to get engaged in the Middle East and contribute to the region’s

⁵⁴ Oğuzlu 2011

⁵⁵ Larrabee 2007; Oğuzlu 2008

⁵⁶ Dal 2012: 254

⁵⁷ Dinc and Yetim 2012: 80-81

⁵⁸ Dal 2012: 250

development on the basis of a ‘a humanitarian and moral imperative rooted in history’.⁵⁹

In addition to this discourse and the general tenets of the ‘zero problems with neighbours’ policy, economic considerations played an important role. Since the AKP came to power, in an attempt to diversify its exports and find new markets for Turkish products, Turkey increased its trade activities with states in the Middle East. In addition, Turkey’s relations with the West and the accession process with the EU also provided some impetus for Turkey’s involvement in the Middle East. As such, Turkey perceived itself as an important link between Europe and the Middle East, not just economically, but also in civilisational terms, fostering a good understanding between these regions (the Alliance of Civilisations, as discussed earlier, being a case in point). Positioning itself as an important economic actor and regional stabiliser in the Middle East, the governing elite saw Turkey as adding a lot of beneficial impact to the EU’s policies in the region should it be accepted as a member one day.

Under the AKP government, Turkey wanted to see its role in the Middle East grow and be perceived as a positive actor and mediator as well as a reliable business partner. In general, according to Erdoğan, Turkey perceives itself as a major player in the Middle East, being guided by a ‘historical and regional mission’ which is principally to bring peace and stability to the region.⁶⁰ There is a strong undertone and reference to Turkey’s historical legacy as heir of the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, under the new civilisational approach of Turkish foreign policy, promoted by Erdoğan and Davutoğlu, the Middle East and the region of the former Ottoman Empire became more important. This refers to the vision of Neo-Ottomanism, in which Turkey embraces its ‘Ottoman great power legacy’, and which ‘calls for a redefinition of Turkey’s strategic and national identity’.⁶¹ As discussed above, the Turkish discourse on Eurasia lost its weight in the context of the AKP’s civilisational discourse, focusing on a much larger geopolitical concept of Afro-Eurasia, covering the region of the former Ottoman Empire.

⁵⁹ Gül 2003a

⁶⁰ Erdoğan 2008.

⁶¹ Taşpınar 2012: 128

7.4 Conclusion

The focus of this chapter was the analysis of the way in which the concept of Eurasia, as described in previous chapters, is linked to the Russian and Turkish governing elites' perception of their country's place in the global system. Put differently, the aim was to analyse which function the concept of Eurasia occupies in Russian and Turkish discourse. Concretely, this means finding answers to four questions: whether the central element of the discourse on Eurasia is related to the issue of power, namely Russia and Turkey as important regional or great powers; whether Eurasia is an inherent part of the two country's national identity; whether pragmatic notions such as political and economic opportunities are at the centre of the discourse on Eurasia; or lastly, whether Eurasia's function is primarily to define Russia's and Turkey's role in the international system.

One of the main arguments of this thesis is that geographical space is not a fixed entity but is shaped and defined through discourse, and thus is being made meaningful through the discursive practices of foreign policy elites. The place of Eurasia in the geopolitical imagination of Russia's and Turkey's governing elite is then also conceptualised referring to the notions of power, role, identity and opportunity. Yet, the analysis above revealed that the issues of role and power, which are closely related, are most central to Russia's and Turkey's Eurasian discourse.

Russia's governing elite sees their country as one of the great powers and an influential and important pole in a multipolar global order. This is one of the fundamental principles of Russian foreign policy. The concept of Eurasia occupies a central position in the conception of Russia's role in the international system in the sense that Russia's power is grounded in its role as the centre of gravity and hegemon in the Eurasian region.

The way in which Turkey's role is characterised by the governing elite in Ankara is as a central country and influential actor. This is based on a geopolitical reading of Turkey's position at the centre of (Afro-)Eurasia and thus as the leader of its own civilisational basin. Hence, Turkey's central position, which is related to Eurasia,

provides the country with manifold links to other countries and regions thus making it a powerful country on the global stage.

Eurasia is an important concept in Russian and Turkish elite discourse and foreign policy. However, and quite naturally so, it is not the only geopolitical space which matters to these countries. Europe and the Euro-Atlantic region occupy an important position in both Russian and Turkish foreign policy, especially in the economic realm but also with regard to these countries' historical and political development. Furthermore, the Asia-Pacific region started to attract more attention from Russian policy-makers due to economic considerations as well as current political developments in Europe. For Turkey, the Middle East and the lands of the former Ottoman Empire increasingly are a central geopolitical zone on the basis of the country's civilisational identity and historical legacy.

The concept of Eurasia is a central feature in Russian and, to a lesser degree, Turkish government discourse. It is also an instrumental concept in that it allows the attribution of different characteristics to Russian and Turkish foreign policy. As such, Eurasia functions as an important zone for Russia's and Turkey's economic development, their political power or role as powerful and influential players in the international system. Most importantly, for both Russia and Turkey, Eurasia is thus a flexible concept which is being shaped and re-shaped by the governing elite's discourse on the basis of changing geopolitical visions.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Eurasia is what Russia and Turkey make of it. Eurasia is a contested zone, a contested concept. There is no single Eurasia but many Eurasias. Its importance lies in the imagination of foreign-policy making elites. Russia and Turkey decide what Eurasia is about and therefore it is important to analyse the way in which Russia and Turkey attribute meaning to it. This thesis argues that geography is more than a fixed entity, that it is a structure upon which meaning is attached through discourses by different actors. The way in which geography is seen, the boundaries it sets and the options it offers, varies according to the geopolitical imagination of a state's governing elite.

This thesis argues against a deterministic interpretation of geography. For instance, a country's position on the global map, for instance, does not determine what kind of foreign policy it will conduct, which alliances it will engage and what its ideological foundation will be. In that sense, geography has more than one dimension. There is indeed the physical dimension, however, there are also a number of other factors, such as historical, cultural and political elements which are attached to a specific geographical location. With regard to international relations, geography does not exist in an ideational vacuum, but is being attributed meaning through the actions and discourses of a variety of actors.

8.1 The Meaning of Eurasia

Eurasia is not a fixed entity. Eurasia serves as a flexible concept which is being shaped and re-shaped through the discourse of Russia's and Turkey's governing elite. It is through this discourse that Eurasia takes on meaning. Changing geopolitical visions lead to different meanings of Eurasia. Political developments and global events influence the way in which Russia and Turkey perceive their position in the global system. Their respective geopolitical imagination is fluid and so is the concept of the geopolitical space of Eurasia. Eurasia is not the same for Russia and Turkey. When the governing elites speak about Eurasia, they might refer to the same region, but they might also be speaking about different concepts.

For Russia, Eurasia is crucial, a foundational idea for the state's position in global affairs and for its foreign policy. For Turkey, Eurasia is less important, given that the state currently emphasises other geographical imaginations. However, in both cases, the interpretation of Eurasia can change at any moment and it can become a very different concept, acquire a new meaning or also lose its relevance. At the same time, what exactly Eurasia means, where it is located, and, for example, which states are part of it, is subject to interpretation and changes.

8.1.1 Russia

As we have seen, there exist other geopolitical imaginaries in Russia such as discourses about the Euro-Atlantic or the Asia-Pacific region. Of course Eurasia does not exist in a vacuum. However, the essential and unique feature of Eurasia in Russian discourse is its almost uncontested nature. In that sense, Eurasia is the geopolitical space which Russia claims to control and where it does not have to subjugate to the hegemonic order of another state actor. That this is a concern becomes clear in Russia's discourse on the Euro-Atlantic, where Russia sought to position itself on par with the US and the EU, calling for a 'triple understanding' between these actors.¹ Indeed, as I argued elsewhere, Russia strived for integration in the Euro-Atlantic space and argued for a balance between the US, the EU and Russia, a tripartite understanding, which would have cemented the status of each with mutual recognition. Since the Ukraine crisis put an end to such ideas, the importance of Eurasia increased.²

Keeping in mind the underlying concern of Russia's governing elite, namely gaining recognition of Russia's status as a great power, it is crucial to be able to claim its own hegemonic geopolitical space, which in addition also acts as a counterhegemonic project to the dominant Western neoliberal space. Eurasia thus comes to exemplify Russian exceptionalism essentially acting as a justification for Russia to be recognised as a great power. Lewis, who studies the evolution of the concept of Greater Eurasia, argues that the value of this idea lies in providing a 'discursive frame for a Russian elite that has the self-confidence to articulate not only a new Russian identity in international affairs but a new world order in which Russia plays a leading role'.³

¹ Lavrov 2007b

² Svarin 2016

³ Lewis 2018: 1633.

Furthermore, Eurasia, or any geopolitical vision outlined by the governing elite, can develop into something bigger, finding appeal in other states. Lewis argues that the values attached to the Greater Eurasia project could find sympathisers in many regions and states from the West to the East, leading to a new formation of like-minded states.⁴ Precisely this is the value of geopolitical concepts and how they are discursively shaped into something which fits several purposes and caters to a variety of audiences. Hence, Eurasia as a geopolitical space functions as a counterhegemonic narrative and idea, providing the Russian elite with a framework and vision for the future development of their country.

8.1.2 Turkey

Turkey occupies an uneasy position in Eurasia. At times, especially in the 1990s and early 2000s, the country's governing elite claimed to be a central Eurasian country and attempted to foster special ties to the newly independent Central Asian republics. More recently, however, the focus of Turkey's geopolitical imagination has shifted, and the Middle Eastern region moved to the centre of Turkish foreign policy. As we have seen in previous chapters, there is a number of reasons for this shift and with regard to the governing elite's discourse, the shift was clearly identifiable with a decrease in the discourse's intensity. Yet, what is important to note with the idea of geography as a discursive practice, is its fleeting nature. This opens up different realms and developmental options for Turkey, all essentially contributing to the idea of the country's central status. Turkey's governing elite can easily fall back on previous Eurasian discourses to claim a new role for their country in the region, or they can simply redefine what Eurasia means for them and adjust their foreign policy accordingly.

This has potentially relevant consequences. Turkey currently seems to have scaled down its interests in Eurasia and consequently its challenge to Russia's position in the region. However, both discursively and with its actions, Turkey could easily and quickly change its stance and start to put more emphasis on its Eurasian vector or identity. For example, Turkey could step up its defence of ethnic Turkic communities in Eurasia, such as the Crimean Tatars (who were opposed to Russia's annexation of

⁴ Lewis 2018: 1633.

Crimea) or engage more closely with Muslim communities in Russia's north Caucasus. This would potentially lead to the emergence of two concepts of Eurasia and two diverging geopolitical imaginations of what Eurasia is and means. Both of them authentic in their own sense, yet in conflict with each other. Neither of the states could claim ownership over a supposedly objective and fixed geographical entity called Eurasia. Considering the profound ideological and ideational meaning of Eurasia for Russia, such a shift in Turkey's position would presumably be followed by a growing competition and potentially conflict between the countries, the potential negative consequences of which are difficult to assess.

8.2 Summary of main findings

Two countries, Russia and Turkey, and their discourse on the geopolitical space of Eurasia, were analysed in this thesis. I have argued that Russia and Turkey see themselves as important countries, not only in regional but also global politics, pursuing the objective to achieve a status of powerful and central countries in the international order. The foundation for this vision is built by their respective historical experience as centres of regional and global empires, as well as their geographical position at the centre of and in-between different continents and regions. In the case of Russia, its status as a global great power and its role as a balancing force in the multipolar international system are key concepts in the governing elite's geopolitical imagination. Similarly, the vision of Turkey as a central country, in geographical terms as well based on a civilisational reading as the leader of its civilisational basin, is a crucial element in guiding the country's foreign policy.

The geopolitical space of Eurasia occupies a place in both Russia's and Turkey's foreign policy vision. However, as this thesis has demonstrated, the importance and centrality of the concept of Eurasia differs considerably from one country to the other. For Turkey, Eurasia is essentially a pragmatic geopolitical concept which is linked to the country's geographically central position between different continents. It is this centrality and the concomitant status of a 'central country', which in turn provides Turkey with an important role in global affairs. For Russia, Eurasia gradually became more important as its exclusive sphere of influence, but also as the geopolitical region in which its future political and economic development is grounded. As the centre and

leader of Eurasia, which Russia vocally claims to be, Russia gains the position as one of the global great powers and thus as a crucial actor on the global stage. The ways in which Eurasia is characterised in the discourse of Russian and Turkish governing elites and which are the main elements of this discourse on Eurasia have formed the core of the analysis presented herein.

8.2.1 Russia

The analysis of Russia's Eurasian discourse was structured along four themes which were dominant in the discourse. First, geography or Russia's geographical location. Second, history or Russia's historical experience. Third, culture and cultural links across Eurasia. Fourth, the economy, that is the economic potential of Eurasia and the need for regional integration. Each of these themes was frequently emphasised by Russia's governing elite at various points in their discourse and they also remained constant, albeit to different degrees, in the evolution of the discourse.

In general, geography is an important element in Russian foreign policy and discourse. The fact that Russia is the biggest country on earth is central and the concomitant geographical reality for Russia's governing elite is that Russia belongs to different geographical regions, while the nucleus of Russia's geographical power lies in Eurasia. A function of its Eurasian location, Russia also acts as a link between the Euro-Atlantic region in the west and the Asia-Pacific region in the east. However, the fact that Russia's governing elite perceives their country to be at the centre of Eurasia is of utmost importance, not only in terms of defining the country geographically but also because it offers real opportunities. As such, the geographical location at the centre of Eurasia acts as a promise for Russia's future economic development, be it as part of the EAEU or as an important link in East-West trade. In political terms, Eurasia is also crucial, as the foundation for Russia's self-understanding as a great global power.

Russia's past experiences and its history as a regional and global empire left an imprint on the geopolitical imagination of Russia's governing elite and thus influences foreign policy. A central element in this regard is Eurasia, the place where Russia's imperial past is grounded. Russia's governing elite perceives a special link to the peoples in Eurasia and the countries which emerged from Russia's former imperial lands. The post-Soviet states occupy a special position in this regard, being considered a political

and historic community by the Russian leadership. Hence, Eurasia and the historic community formed by countries in Eurasia, which are all linked to Russia, is crucial for the future development of Russia and the Eurasian region.

The structure of the international system is a major concern for Russia's governing elite. As we have seen, they characterise it as a multipolar system (or in their words, polycentric), while Russia, as the centre of Eurasia, acts as one of the poles. In this context, the theme of the economy and economic integration is fundamental. Regional economic integration is important for Russia to retain its role as the leader of the Eurasian region. Hence, the importance of Eurasia is not only tied to the potential for the future economic development of Russia, but also to its survival in an increasingly interconnected and multipolar world. The fact that Eurasia is characterised as an independent region in the international system, also thanks to its own regional integration scheme, in combination with Russia's dominant position in the region, is an essential element in Russian government discourse on Eurasia.

After Putin's return to the presidency in 2012, the theme of economic integration in Eurasia took centre stage. Being of course strongly infused by historical and geographical references to Eurasia, this discourse served the purpose to paint a particular image of Russia in the 21st century. For Russia's governing elite, the geopolitical space of Eurasia serves as the foundation for the future development of Russia. Being the motor of development for the entire Eurasian region, elevates Russia's position and provides it with the status as a global great power.

The Eurasian Union acts as the vehicle for Russian influence in Eurasia. In addition, it provides a link to other regions through the idea of integrating the various existing regional integration schemes. Eurasia is thus one of the poles or geopolitical regions in the new global system. The idea of the existence of a competition between geopolitical zones, as expressed by President Putin,⁵ gained new impetus in the aftermath of the Ukraine crisis, starting in 2013, which marked the culmination of tensions between Russia and the West, leading to an unprecedented low in their relations. Previously, Russia's governing elite spoke about Russia's belonging to

⁵ Putin 2013

various geopolitical regions, including the Euro-Atlantic and the Asia-Pacific. However, events in Ukraine demonstrated to Russia's leadership the impossibility of integration within the structures of the Euro-Atlantic. The Ukraine crisis and the problematic relationship between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community more generally, has epitomised these sentiments and Eurasia's value to Russia. The idea of Eurasia as a Russia-dominated space which acts as a pushback against the encroaching Western world and institutions, such as the EU and NATO, while at the same time offering an alternative model for development against the neoliberal world order, has emerged as a central narrative in Russian foreign policy. Political events, taking place inside as well as outside Russia, thus have an important impact and influence on the Russian governing elite's geopolitical imagination and consequently determine the way in which Eurasia is conceptualised by said elite.

The essence of the geopolitical imagination of Russia's governing elite consists of seeing Russia, as a global great power, stuck in competition with other great powers. Being at the centre of Eurasia and simultaneously the leader of the Eurasian region is a crucial element in this context. This position serves as the backbone for Russian power projection while at the same time offering actual economic and political opportunities. Hence, Eurasia is also important for the future development of Russia. All this put together, leads to a vision of Russia as the quintessential Eurasian country and the centre of gravity for the entire Eurasian region, which guarantees it the continued status as one of the principal poles and great powers in the current international system.

8.2.2 Turkey

In Turkish elite discourse on Eurasia, four themes are central: geography, history, culture and economy. Of these themes, geographical elements are predominant. Turkey is described as a central country on the basis of its geographical location at the intersection of Europe, Asia and the Middle East. In this regard, Turkey perfectly fits the description of a Eurasian country. Under Foreign Minister Davutoğlu, the geopolitical concept of Afro-Eurasia became the foundation of Turkey's geopolitical imagination. The combination of Turkey's geographically strategic position in conjunction with its role in the cultural and historical development of the Afro-

Eurasian region, occupies an important place in the discourse of Turkey's governing elite.

While geography, or Turkey's geographic location, serves as the foundation for Turkey's role in Eurasia, its historical experience as the former centre of a regional empire and the ensuing cultural and ethnic links to countries in the vast Eurasia region, further positions Turkey as an important actor in Eurasia. This is particularly visible in Turkish elite discourse with reference to the countries of Central Asia. On the basis of ethnic and kinship ties, a special relationship and even responsibility for these countries is described. As a result of this unique position, Turkey at times aimed to play an active and formative role in Eurasia. Hence, cultural and historical arguments add weight and substance to the geographical argument in supporting the characterisation of Turkey as a central country in Eurasia.

The final theme, the economy, combines all the elements in Turkey's Eurasian discourse. While generally speaking, Turkey's Eurasian position in-between the East and the West is described as an advantage for the country's political and economic development, at the forefront of Turkish government discourse on Eurasia with regard to the economy stands the issue of energy. As such, Turkey aims to act as an important energy hub and transit country. The discourse of Turkey's governing elite paints an image of Turkey as a Eurasian energy bridge. Exploiting its various links to energy-rich countries in the Eurasian region, Turkey's leadership sees opportunities for its country to benefit economically, while at the same time enhancing its status as an influential regional player. Future opportunities and pragmatic economic considerations are principal elements increasing the meaning of Eurasia for Turkey.

Various exponents of Turkey's governing elite evoked geopolitical images, such as Turkey as a central country and Turkey as a bridge, and they have become fixed notions in Turkish conceptions of Eurasia. What becomes clear is that Turkey does not consider Eurasia to be a defining trait in terms of its national identity. In general, Turkey's identity oscillated between multiple identities such as European, Eurasian, or Middle Eastern. However, over the years, and in particular due to the increasing influence of Ahmet Davutoğlu, this multiple identity evolved into one dominant identity, namely that of Turkey as a Afro-Eurasian country. What this meant in terms

of policy was an increased focus on Turkey's regional environment and its historical Ottoman territories while emphasising the country's geographical uniqueness as a defining feature.

The place and importance of Eurasia in Turkish elite discourse from 2002 to 2015 was not stable. Broadly two distinct periods can be identified: the early years of the AKP's rule, followed by the period marked by the ascension of Davutoğlu (although he is not to be credited alone for the change in discourse) as well as the cementation of the AKP's power in Turkey. In general, pragmatic considerations are at the centre of Turkey's Eurasian discourse. This was especially true in the early period. During this period, Turkey developed close relations with Western partners and aimed to benefit from its geographical location and ties to countries in Eurasia, and especially in Central Asia, by acting as a link between Europe and this region. Over the years, however, the focus of the Turkish governing elite's geopolitical imagination shifted to a stronger emphasis on civilisational geopolitics. The former territories of the Ottoman Empire, as well as the MENA region more generally, gained importance. While Turkey's leadership foresaw a more prominent role for their country globally as an influential actor, its geopolitical vision was enlarged. The concept of Afro-Eurasia and Turkey's location at the centre of this geopolitical space became determinant factors. Hence, the Turkish discourse on Eurasia reveals the perception by the governing elite of Turkey as a crucial country sitting in-between different regions and cultures, while linking them to each other.

At the foundation of Turkish foreign policy is the understanding by the governing elite that Turkey occupies the position of a central country and concomitantly as an influential global actor. This is primarily based on a geopolitical reading of Turkey's position at the centre of (Afro-)Eurasia. However, this is also coupled with a historical understanding, because the country's legacy as the heir of the Ottoman Empire and its role as a bridge between civilisations, positions Turkey as the leader of its own civilisational basin. Hence, Turkey's central position, which is also related to Eurasia both geographically and culturally, provides the country with manifold links to other countries and regions, thus making it a powerful country on the global stage.

In addition to strong cultural and ethnic links to countries in the vast Eurasian region as well as Turkey's historical weight as former imperial power, this elevates Turkey to the status of a central country in global affairs. What is more, serving as a link between East and West, both with regard to civilisational dialogue between different cultures as well as based on economic considerations and Turkey's role as energy hub, positions Turkey as an important piece in the formation of an interconnected Eurasia.

8.3 Geopolitical space as a discursive concept

At the centre of this thesis was a critical geopolitical analysis of the meaning of Eurasia for Russia and Turkey. As stated at the outset, two objectives were central to this research. First, to analyse the importance of the place of Eurasia in Russia's and Turkey's foreign policy outlook in terms of their regional and geographical orientation, and more generally, in Russian and Turkish self-perception of their place in the international system. The purpose was to contribute to a deeper understanding of the nuances of Russia's and Turkey's geopolitical discourses and imaginaries. The second objective was to study the concept of 'geopolitical space' and the way in which geographical and geopolitical imaginations influence Russian and Turkish foreign policy, thus essentially uncovering the structures of meaning within the Russian and Turkish foreign policy elite.

Traditional geopolitics is static in that it is considered essentially as being related to statecraft with the aim to gain political power through the exploitation of geography. Similarly, geographic determinism, such as often in display in more popular descriptions of global politics,⁶ postulates that geography determines the way in which political leaders think about their state's position and options in world politics. For example, Russia's historical expansion into Eastern Europe or its current policies in Eurasia with regard to its neighbours in the East, such as in Ukraine but also with regard to Belarus, is explained by the need for Russia to gain strategic depth and control territories which, in the case of war, prevent external aggressors to reach the Russian heartland.⁷ While such arguments and geographical imaginaries might

⁶ See for example such popular books like Kaplan 2012 or Marshall 2015, who basically argue that looking at maps is sufficient to understand (and even foresee) international relations and global conflicts.

⁷ See Marshall 2015: 11-39 for his detailed discussion of Russia's geopolitical predicament.

contribute to an understanding of Russia's geopolitical imagination and its foreign policy, they are by no means the only explanation. Ignoring the emotional and cultural aspects of Russian foreign policy, the beliefs and visions of the state's leaders will only present a partial image.

Geographic determinism fails to account for what Toal defined as 'geopolitical culture', namely 'how states see the world, how they spatialize it and strategize about the fundamental tasks of the state'.⁸ This thesis contributes to the critique of classical geopolitical thought in that it highlights how geopolitical imaginations are influenced by a variety of factors, ranging for example from political to historical and cultural factors, as well as how they evolve in relation to the outside world. Hence, the concept of Eurasia is not necessarily identical in the Russian and Turkish imaginary and it is not a static entity.

A central element in this regard is the notion of geopolitical space as a discursive concept. This places the emphasis on actors, in this case the Russian and Turkish governing elite, and the way in which they comprehend their geographical environment. This thesis thus agrees with Toal, who argued that 'there is no objective relationship between the geographic location of a territorial entity and its geopolitical culture. Geography as earthly location and resource endowment is what states make of it'.⁹ What follows from this is that in order to analyse and understand the meaning of Eurasia for Russian and Turkish foreign policy, we have to look at it from the angle of the governing elite's geopolitical imagination. Hence, I argue that Eurasia as a geopolitical concept, is a construct which functions primarily in the discursive realm for it to take on any significance.

The notion of geopolitical space is not new. As an analytical concept it is flexible and broad and can thus serve many purposes. Hence, every country has its geopolitical spaces to which it attributes meaning in relation to current priorities and foreign policy principles. The analytical value of the concept is precisely this, namely that it is a discursive concept which changes (or can be changed) and which is inherently linked

⁸ Toal 2017: 10

⁹ Toal 2017: 40

to and attached to a country's geopolitical culture and geopolitical imagination as well as its foreign policy.

Although discourse is a central element in critical geopolitics, there remains a gap in presenting methodologically thorough applications of the concept in research. Or, to put it differently, there exist a variety of ways of doing discourse analysis. Indeed, as Müller argues, 'there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the analysis of discourse. Every discourse analytic methodology must be attuned to the different requirements and aims of the respective case study'.¹⁰ What this calls for is a transparent description of the framework or approach chosen by the researcher. I developed and applied a two-step model clearly outlining a potential framework for doing critical geopolitical discourse analysis in the field of International Relations. Its application to the study of foreign policy builds upon and contributes to the advancement of future studies linking the fields of critical geopolitics and foreign policy analysis. Even though critical geopolitics is not interested in positivist research methodologies, introducing an explanatory variable into discourse analysis fosters a more practice-oriented research, aimed at not only uncovering structures of meaning in a state's foreign policy, but trying to explain the origins, impact and potential consequences of these structures.

Critical geopolitics focuses on actors and how they attribute value to places and it considers geopolitics not as a given, but as an ideological and politicised form of analysis. Russia and Turkey are not what Eurasia makes of them, but Eurasia is what Russia and Turkey make of it. This thesis aimed to demonstrate that geopolitical visions are shaped by the ideas and identities of actors, in this case Russia's and Turkey's governing elites, and are not given by the geographical realities of these countries. The analysis above illustrated how the meaning of Eurasia changed and evolved over time and how certain events (which might or might not be related to Eurasia) or political beliefs influenced the way in which Eurasia was conceptualised. Hence, we cannot expect to know what Eurasia will mean for Russia and Turkey in the future and what form or shape it will take in these countries' elites' geopolitical imagination. For policy-makers, especially in the West, this might be an unsatisfactory outlook, because they want to know what Russia or what Turkey are going to make

¹⁰ Müller 2010: 15

next. If it is their ambition to understand Russia's and Turkey's geopolitical visions, they need to continue to listen to what these actors actually say, how they say it and how it is received by the audience in question.

An additional point is that Russian and Turkish discourse on Eurasia do not evolve in a vacuum. The way in which these states define their identity and define the geopolitical space of Eurasia, also has implications for the West and above all for Europe. There is a dialectical relationship between discourses. Morozov and Rumelili, for example, have used Russia's and Turkey's European discourse to demonstrate how Russia and Turkey have contributed to the construction of Europe's identity through 'the historically varying ways in which Turkey and Russia, as Europe's liminal Others, have responded to discourses on European identity through their own representational practices'.¹¹ Hence, in presenting their definition and interpretation of the space of Eurasia, Russia and Turkey influence the discursive space of other actors, such as the EU and other Western institutions, and influence their own identity-building.

In the case of Turkey, for example, the discourse on Eurasia has been labelled as a pragmatic discourse focusing on the positive effects of Turkey's Eurasian location for its status in global affairs but also for its relationship with Europe in portraying Turkey as an important link between Europe and Eurasia. In that sense, Turkey's Eurasian discourse is a transcending discourse. It is not geared towards challenging the West but finding a place for itself in that West,¹² while transforming the Western discourse on a civilisational and cultural basis. In the case of Russia, Eurasia functions as a counterhegemonic discourse portraying Russia as a great power, as the leader of the 'geopolitical zone' of Eurasia. This wasn't always the case. At first, Russia's governing elite emphasised the cooperative nature of the Eurasian integration project and the need for positive relations with the EU. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov for example called for 'the integration of integrations', meaning the convergence of European and Eurasian integration projects.¹³ However, since the Ukraine crisis, the discourse has become competitive and much more value-based, offering an alternative model for state development to the Western model and thus challenging the Western

¹¹ Morozov and Rumelili 2012: 29

¹² One might argue that technically, as a member of NATO, Turkey is already part of the West.

¹³ Lavrov 2014e

discourse. The Russian Eurasia discourse thus has a dialectical impact on the Western hegemonic discourse in that it contributes to the consolidation of this discourse in the Western community and reinforces the boundaries between the discourses and indeed between Russia and the West.

In current geopolitical debates, Russia is often characterised as the Eurasian empire, a role it has held for the last few centuries. However, Eurasia is not just the new form of Russian empire, there is more to it. And of course, there are also other states which claim agency in Eurasia, not only Turkey, which has been treated in this thesis, but countless other states, for example China or Kazakhstan, as well as social groups. Eurasia has to be considered as a 'geopolitical field' in the understanding of Toal, namely as 'the sociospatial context of statecraft and the social players, rules, and spatial dynamics constituting the arena'.¹⁴ Eurasia is subtle and nuanced, as this thesis set out to demonstrate.

The value of this research thus lies in its emphasis on the limits of binary representations of geography and politics and the need for analytical flexibility. The way in which Russia and Turkey act, is not purely determined by supposed geographical realities, but by the way in which these realities are articulated, interpreted and transformed by the Russian and Turkish governing elite. Indeed, Eurasia is what Russia and Turkey make of it.

¹⁴ Toal 2017: 9

Chapter 9: References

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9.2 Personal interviews in Turkey and Russia

9.2.1 Turkey

- 1) Senior academic, Ankara, 15 January 2015
- 2) Former Turkish diplomat and think tank representative, Ankara, 5 February 2015
- 3) Think tank representative, Ankara, 5 February 2015
- 4) Think tank representative, Ankara, 6 February 2015
- 5) Senior academic, Ankara, 10 February 2015
- 6) Think tank representative, Ankara, 18 February 2015
- 7) Senior academic, Istanbul, 19 February 2015
- 8) Senior academic, Istanbul, 20 February 2015
- 9) Senior academic, Istanbul, 24 February 2015
- 10) Senior academic, Ankara, 27 February 2015
- 11) Turkish diplomat, Ankara, 10 March 2015
- 12) Think tank representative, Ankara, 13 March 2015

9.2.2 Russia

- 1) Russian diplomat, Moscow, 21 April 2015
- 2) Foreign diplomat, Moscow, 23 April 2015
- 3) Foreign diplomat, Moscow, 6 May 2015
- 4) Think tank representative, Moscow, 12 May 2015
- 5) Senior academic, Moscow, 15 May 2015
- 6) Junior Russian diplomat, Moscow, 29 May 2015
- 7) Senior academic, Moscow, 1 June 2015
- 8) Think tank representative, 3 June 2015
- 9) Senior academic, Moscow, 3 June 2015
- 10) Senior academic, Moscow, 4 June 2015

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Chapter 10: Appendix

Below is the complete list of all the collected speeches and interviews of Russian and Turkish government officials in chronological order and in the standard format *year-mm-dd-speaker-occasion*. The documents that have been used in the discourse analysis are referenced in the reference list (see 9.1 *Primary sources*).

10.1. Russia: speeches, interviews and articles

- 1) 2000-06-02-Putin-Interview with NBC News Channel
- 2) 2000-07-08-Putin-Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation
- 3) 2000-07-16-Putin-Interview with Renmin Ribao, News Agency Xinhua and RTR TV Company
- 4) 2001-01-26-Putin-Remarks at a Meeting of Top Members of the Russian Diplomatic Service
- 5) 2001-02-04-S.Ivanov-Speech at the 37th Munich Conference on Security Policy
- 6) 2001-04-03-Putin-Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation
- 7) 2001-07-16-Putin-Interview with Corriere della Sera
- 8) 2001-07-18-Putin-Press Conference for Russian and Foreign Journalists
- 9) 2001-09-19-Putin-Interview with the Focus Magazine
- 10) 2001-09-21-I.Ivanov-Speech at Nixon Institute Washington
- 11) 2001-11-14-Putin-Speech at Rice University
- 12) 2002-01-15-Putin-Interview with Gazeta Wyborcza and TVP Channel
- 13) 2002-02-03-S.Ivanov-Speech at the 38th Munich Conference on Security Policy
- 14) 2002-04-18-Putin-Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation
- 15) 2002-05-06-I.Ivanov-Speech at Meeting of Foreign Ministers of States of the SCO
- 16) 2002-05-22-Putin-Remarks at State Council Presidium Meeting on Foreign Policy Issue
- 17) 2002-06-24-Putin-News Conference for Russian and Foreign Journalists
- 18) 2002-07-12-Putin-Speech to Heads of Russian Diplomatic Missions Abroad
- 19) 2002-07-31-I.Ivanov-Speech at the 9th Session of the ASEAN Regional Forum
- 20) 2002-12-03-Putin-Speech at Beijing University
- 21) 2003-02-08-S.Ivanov-Speech at the 39th Munich Conference on Security Policy
- 22) 2003-03-26-I.Ivanov-Speech at Federation Council Meeting
- 23) 2003-05-16-Putin-Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation
- 24) 2003-06-20-Putin-Press Conference with Russian and Foreign Media
- 25) 2003-07-03-Putin-Interview with the Malaysian New Straits Times
- 26) 2003-09-01-I.Ivanov-Speech at MGIMO

- 27) 2003-09-25-Putin-Speech at the 58th session of the UNGA
- 28) 2003-10-04-Putin-Interview with New York Times
- 29) 2003-10-16-Putin-Speech at OIC Summit
- 30) 2003-11-25-Putin-Address at a Meeting of the Presidential Council for Culture and Art
- 31) 2003-11-26-Putin-Speech at Columbia University
- 32) 2004-02-07-S.Ivanov-Speech at the 40th Munich Conference on Security Policy
- 33) 2004-05-26-Putin-Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation
- 34) 2004-07-09-Lavrov-Interview with Rossiiskaya Gazeta
- 35) 2004-07-12-Putin-Speech at Russian Federation Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives Meeting
- 36) 2004-07-13-S.Ivanov-Speech at IISS
- 37) 2004-09-09-Lavrov-Interview with Voice of Russia Radio Station
- 38) 2004-09-09-Lavrov-Interview with Vremya Novostei
- 39) 2004-09-10-Lavrov-Interview with Al-Jazeera TV Channel
- 40) 2004-12-03-Putin-Speech at a Conference in the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Foundation
- 41) 2004-12-23-Putin-Press Conference with Russian and Foreign Media
- 42) 2005-02-12-S.Ivanov-Speech at the 41st Munich Conference on Security Policy
- 43) 2005-04-25-Putin-Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation
- 44) 2005-05-03-Lavrov-Interview with Political Journal
- 45) 2005-05-16-Lavrov-Speech at the Third Summit of the Council of Europe
- 46) 2005-05-21-Lavrov-Speech at State Duma Session
- 47) 2005-09-15-Putin-Speech at the 60th Session of the UN General Assembly
- 48) 2005-10-31-Putin-Interview with Television Channel Nederland 1 and Newspaper NRC Handelsblad
- 49) 2005-12-06-Lavrov-Speech at OSCE Ministerial Council
- 50) 2006-01-31-Putin-Press Conference for the Russian and Foreign Media
- 51) 2006-02-05-S.Ivanov-Speech at the 42nd Munich Conference on Security Policy
- 52) 2006-03-08-Lavrov-Interview with Rossia TV Channel
- 53) 2006-03-15-Lavrov-Interview with Arab Media
- 54) 2006-05-10-Putin-Annual Address to the Federal Assembly
- 55) 2006-06-27-Putin-Speech at Meeting with the Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives of the Russian Federation
- 56) 2006-09-09-Putin-Meeting with Members of the Valdai International Discussion Club
- 57) 2006-12-04-Lavrov-Speech at OSCE Ministerial Council
- 58) 2007-01-18-Putin-Interview for Indian Television Channel Doordarshan and Press Trust of India News Agency
- 59) 2007-02-01-Putin-Press Conference with the Russian and Foreign Media
- 60) 2007-02-10-Putin-Interview with Al-Jazeera
- 61) 2007-02-10-Putin-Speech at the 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy
- 62) 2007-02-11-S.Ivanov-Speech at the 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy
- 63) 2007-02-28-Lavrov-Interview Rossiiskaya Gazeta
- 64) 2007-03-17-Lavrov-Speech at the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy

- 65) 2007-04-26-Putin-Annual Address to the Federal Assembly
- 66) 2007-05-13-Lavrov-The Present and the Future of Global Politics-Article in Russia in Global Affairs
- 67) 2007-07-09-Lavrov-Speech at SCO Council of Foreign Ministers Meeting
- 68) 2007-09-03-Lavrov-Speech at MGIMO
- 69) 2007-09-14-Putin-Meeting with Members of the Valdai International Discussion Club
- 70) 2007-10-24-Lavrov-Interview with Helsingin Sanomat
- 71) 2007-11-26-Lavrov-Interview with Magazine Itogi
- 72) 2007-11-29-Lavrov-Speech at OSCE Ministerial Council
- 73) 2007-12-19-Putin-Interview with TIME Magazine
- 74) 2007-12-26-Lavrov-Interview with Vremya Novostei
- 75) 2008-02-10-S.Ivanov-Speech at the 44th Munich Conference on Security Policy
- 76) 2008-02-14-Putin-Press Conference with Russian and Foreign Media
- 77) 2008-03-31-Lavrov-Interview with Izvestia
- 78) 2008-05-07-Medvedev-Speech at Inauguration Ceremony as President of Russia
- 79) 2008-05-22-Medvedev-Interview with Chinese Media
- 80) 2008-06-25-Medvedev-Interview with Reuters
- 81) 2008-07-03-Medvedev-Interview with journalists from the G8 countries
- 82) 2008-07-15-Medvedev-Speech at the Meeting with Russian Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives to International Organisations
- 83) 2008-08-28-Medvedev-Speech at a Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO
- 84) 2008-09-12-Medvedev-Meeting with the Participants in the International Club Valdai
- 85) 2008-09-01-Lavrov-Speech at MGIMO
- 86) 2008-09-11-Putin-Meeting with Valdai International Discussion Club
- 87) 2008-10-08-Medvedev-Speech at World Policy Conference
- 88) 2008-10-25-Lavrov-Speech at the Bergedorf Forum
- 89) 2008-11-05-Medvedev-Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation
- 90) 2008-11-13-Medvedev-Interview to Le Figaro
- 91) 2008-11-15-Medvedev-Speech at the G-20 Summit
- 92) 2008-12-05-Lavrov-Speech at the OSCE Ministerial Council
- 93) 2009-02-06-S.Ivanov-Speech at the 45th Munich Conference on Security Policy
- 94) 2009-03-25-Lavrov-Interview with Financial Times
- 95) 2009-03-29-Medvedev-Interview with BBC
- 96) 2009-04-06-Lavrov-Interview with Rossiiskaya Gazeta
- 97) 2009-04-09-Lavrov-Interview with RIA Novosti, the Voice of Russia Radio Station and the Russia Today TV
- 98) 2009-04-10-Lavrov-Interview with Interstate Television and Radio Company 'Mir'
- 99) 2009-04-13-Medvedev-Interview with Novaya Gazeta
- 100) 2009-04-20-Medvedev-Speech at Helsinki University
- 101) 2009-04-23-Lavrov-Interview with BBC Russian Service
- 102) 2009-05-16-Medvedev-Interview with Rossiya TV Channel
- 103) 2009-06-03-Medvedev-Interview to CNBC TV channel
- 104) 2009-06-15-Medvedev-Interview to the China Central TV Host

- 105) 2009-07-05-Medvedev-Interview to RAI and Corriere della Sera
- 106) 2009-09-10-Medvedev-Article Go Russia!
- 107) 2009-09-15-Medvedev-Meeting with Valdai International Discussion Club Participants
- 108) 2009-09-18-Medvedev-Interview for the Swiss Media
- 109) 2009-09-20-Medvedev-Interview with CNN
- 110) 2009-10-16-Lavrov-Interview with RIA Novosti News Agency, Russia Today TV and Voice of Russia Radio Station
- 111) 2009-11-12-Medvedev-Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation
- 112) 2009-12-01-Lavrov-Speech at the OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting
- 113) 2010-02-06-S.Ivanov-Speech at the 46th Munich Conference on Security Policy
- 114) 2010-02-06-Lavrov-Speech at the 46th Munich Security Conference
- 115) 2010-02-25-Lavrov-Interview with RIA Novosti, Russia Today TV and Voice of Russia Radio Station
- 116) 2010-03-05-Lavrov-Speech CIS Member States International Economic Forum
- 117) 2010-04-12-Medvedev-Interview with ABC News TV channel
- 118) 2010-05-07-Medvedev-Interview with Izvestia Newspaper
- 119) 2010-05-21-Putin-Speech at meeting of the EurAsEC Interstate Council's heads of government
- 120) 2010-06-11-Lavrov-Interview with Kommersant
- 121) 2010-07-07-Lavrov-Interview with Mir Television and Radio Company
- 122) 2010-07-12-Medvedev-Speech at the Meeting with Russian Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives to International Organisations
- 123) 2010-11-30-Medvedev-Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation
- 124) 2010-12-06-Medvedev-Interview to Polish media
- 125) 2011-01-26-Medvedev-Speech at the WEF in Davos
- 126) 2011-04-12-Medvedev-Interview with China Central Television
- 127) 2011-04-13-Lavrov-Interview with Xinhua News Agency
- 128) 2011-05-18-Medvedev-News conference by President of Russia
- 129) 2011-06-01-Lavrov-Interview with Bloomberg
- 130) 2011-06-20-Medvedev-Interview with Financial Times
- 131) 2011-06-30-Lavrov-Speech at Meeting of the Committee on International Affairs of the State Duma
- 132) 2011-07-07-Lavrov-Interview with Vesti 24 Television Channel
- 133) 2011-09-01-Lavrov-Speech at MGIMO University
- 134) 2011-09-27-Lavrov-Interview with Rossiya 24 TV Channel
- 135) 2011-09-27-Lavrov-Speech at the 66th Session of the UN General Assembly
- 136) 2011-10-04-Putin-Article in Izvestia: A New Integration Project for Eurasia
- 137) 2011-11-07-Putin-Speech at meeting of the SCO heads of government
- 138) 2011-12-22-Medvedev-Address to the Federal Assembly
- 139) 2011-12-23-Lavrov-Interview with Reuters
- 140) 2011-12-26-Lavrov-Interview with Interfax News Agency
- 141) 2012-01-23-Putin-Article in Nezavisimaya Gazeta: The Ethnicity Issue
- 142) 2012-01-27-Lavrov-Interview with Izvestia
- 143) 2012-02-27-Putin-Article in Moskovskiye Novosti: Russia and the changing world
- 144) 2012-03-20-Lavrov-Interview with Kommersant FM Radio Station

- 145) 2012-03-23-Medvedev-Speech at RIAC conference
- 146) 2012-04-26-Medvedev-Interview to Russian TV networks
- 147) 2012-04-27-Lavrov-Interview Russia 24 TV channel
- 148) 2012-05-07-Putin-Speech at Inauguration as President of Russia
- 149) 2012-06-03-Lavrov-Interview with Hinhua News Agency
- 150) 2012-09-01-Lavrov-Speech at MGIMO
- 151) 2012-09-03-Lavrov-Interview with RIA Novosti
- 152) 2012-09-06-Lavrov-Interview with China Central Television
- 153) 2012-09-06-Putin-Interview to Russia Today TV Channel
- 154) 2012-09-13-Lavrov-Interview with International Affairs journal
- 155) 2012-09-25-Lavrov-Interview with PBS
- 156) 2012-10-03-Lavrov-Interview with Kommersant
- 157) 2012-10-25-Putin-Meeting with Valdai International Discussion Club participants
- 158) 2012-11-02-Medvedev-Article: Russia ASEM's Connecting Link
- 159) 2012-11-08-Lavrov-Interview with RIA Novosti, Moscow News and Russia in Global Affairs
- 160) 2012-11-13-Medvedev-Interview with Finish Media
- 161) 2012-11-26-Medvedev-Interview to France Presse and Le Figaro
- 162) 2012-11-29-Medvedev-Interview to Kommersant newspaper
- 163) 2012-12-01-Lavrov-Speech at International Conference 'Russia in the world of force of the XXI century'
- 164) 2012-12-07-Medvedev-Interview with 5 Russian TV Channels
- 165) 2012-12-12-Putin-Annual Address to the Federal Assembly
- 166) 2012-12-19-Lavrov-Interview with Euronews TV
- 167) 2012-12-20-Putin-News conference of Vladimir Putin
- 168) 2013-01-16-Medvedev-Speech at the 4th Gaidar Forum
- 169) 2013-01-23-Medvedev-Interview with Bloomberg TV
- 170) 2013-01-23-Medvedev-Speech at the WEF Davos
- 171) 2013-01-24-Medvedev-Interview with NTV
- 172) 2013-01-25-Medvedev-Interview with Swiss newspaper NZZ
- 173) 2013-01-26-Medvedev-Interview with Rossiya TV
- 174) 2013-01-27-Medvedev-Interview with CNN
- 175) 2013-02-02-Lavrov-Speech at the 49th Munich Security Conference
- 176) 2013-02-23-Medvedev-Interview with Prensa Latina news agency
- 177) 2013-02-26-Medvedev-Interview with the Brazilian TV network Globo
- 178) 2013-03-21-Medvedev-Interview with European media
- 179) 2013-03-28-Lavrov-Article published in International Affairs magazine
- 180) 2013-06-19-Lavrov-Interview with KUNA Kuwait news agency
- 181) 2013-06-20-Lavrov-Interview with Rossiya 24
- 182) 2013-08-04-Medvedev-Interview to Russia Today TV channel
- 183) 2013-09-19-Putin-Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club
- 184) 2013-09-25-Lavrov-Interview with The Washington Post
- 185) 2013-09-27-Medvedev-Article The time of simple solutions is past
- 186) 2013-09-28-Medvedev-Interview with Rossiya 24 TV channel
- 187) 2013-11-01-Medvedev-Interview with Reuters
- 188) 2013-11-04-Putin-Interview to Channel One and Associated Press news agency
- 189) 2013-11-12-Putin-Interview to Korean Broadcasting System
- 190) 2013-12-06-Medvedev-Interview with 5 Russian TV Channels
- 191) 2013-12-19-Putin-News conference of Vladimir Putin

- 192) 2013-12-21-Lavrov-Interview with Interfax
- 193) 2013-12-24-Lavrov-Interview with Russia Today
- 194) 2014-01-05-Medvedev-Speech at 5th Gaidar Forum
- 195) 2014-01-15-Medvedev-Interview with RBC-TV
- 196) 2014-01-22-Medvedev-Interview with CNN
- 197) 2014-02-01-Lavrov-Speech at Munich Security Conference
- 198) 2014-02-13-Lavrov-Article published in Kommersant
- 199) 2014-03-18-Putin-Address by President of the Russian Federation in Sevastopol
- 200) 2014-03-20-Lavrov-Speech during the plenary session of the State Duma
- 201) 2014-03-27-Lavrov-Article published in the European Club magazine
- 202) 2014-04-11-Lavrov-Interview with Russia 1 TV channel
- 203) 2014-05-14-Lavrov-Interview with Bloomberg TV
- 204) 2014-05-20-Medvedev-Interview with Bloomberg TV
- 205) 2014-05-23-Lavrov-Speech at Moscow International Security Conference
- 206) 2014-05-23-Putin-Speech at 18th St. Petersburg International Economic Forum
- 207) 2014-05-25-Medvedev-Interview with the Rossiya-1 TV channel
- 208) 2014-06-03-Putin-Interview with Radio Europe 1 and TF1 TV channel
- 209) 2014-06-04-Lavrov-Speech at Russian International Affairs Council
- 210) 2014-07-01-Putin-Conference of Russian ambassadors and permanent representatives
- 211) 2014-07-18-Lavrov-Interview with Russia 24 TV-channel
- 212) 2014-08-27-Lavrov-Speech at International Youth Forum Seliger
- 213) 2014-09-08-Medvedev-Interview with Vedomosti Newspaper
- 214) 2014-09-10-Lavrov-Interview with ITAR-TASS
- 215) 2014-09-17-Lavrov-Interview with Russia Beyond the Headlines
- 216) 2014-09-27-Lavrov-Speech at 69th session of the UN General Assembly
- 217) 2014-09-28-Lavrov-Interview with Channel Five
- 218) 2014-10-15-Medvedev-Interview with CNBC
- 219) 2014-10-19-Lavrov-Interview with NTV
- 220) 2014-10-20-Lavrov-Lecture on Russia's current foreign policy
- 221) 2014-10-25-Putin-Valdai Discussion Club Final Plenary Session
- 222) 2014-10-27-Lavrov-interview with Life News television and Izvestia daily
- 223) 2014-11-06-Putin-Interview to China's leading media companies
- 224) 2014-11-13-Putin-Interview to German TV channel ARD
- 225) 2014-11-19-Lavrov-Speech at Government Hour in the State Duma
- 226) 2014-11-22-Lavrov-Speech at the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy
- 227) 2014-12-04-Lavrov-Speech at meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council
- 228) 2014-12-04-Putin-Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly
- 229) 2014-12-09-Putin-Interview to the Indian Information Agency PTI
- 230) 2014-12-09-Lavrov-Interview with Rossiya Segodnya news agency
- 231) 2014-12-10-Medvedev-Interview with 5 Russian TV Channels
- 232) 2014-12-18-Putin-News conference of Vladimir Putin
- 233) 2014-12-25-Lavrov-Interview with Kommersant newspaper
- 234) 2014-12-25-Lavrov-Interview with Rossiya-1 TV Channel
- 235) 2015-01-04-Medvedev-Speech at the 6th Gaidar Forum
- 236) 2015-01-21-Lavrov-News conference on Russia's diplomatic performance
- 237) 2015-02-07-Lavrov-Speech at Munich Security Conference
- 238) 2015-02-23-Putin-Interview with VGTRK

- 239) 2015-02-27-Lavrov-Address at Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- 240) 2015-03-21-Lavrov-Interview with TV channel Rossiya 1
- 241) 2015-04-05-Medvedev-Interview with Vietnamese media
- 242) 2015-04-06-Lavrov-Interview with Rossiya Segodnya
- 243) 2015-04-08-Medvedev-Interview with Nation Thai media group
- 244) 2015-04-16-Putin-Direct Line with Vladimir Putin
- 245) 2015-04-22-Lavrov-interview with Sputnik, Ekho Moskvy and Govorit Moskva
- 246) 2015-04-27-Lavrov-Interview with Rossiya-24
- 247) 2015-05-06-Lavrov-interview for Russia Beyond the Headlines supplement to Handelsblatt
- 248) 2015-05-23-Medvedev-Interview with Rossiya 1 TV network
- 249) 2015-05-29-Lavrov-Interview to Rossiya 24 TV channel
- 250) 2015-06-02-Lavrov-Interview with Bloomberg Television
- 251) 2015-06-06-Putin-Interview to Il Corriere della Sera
- 252) 2015-06-19-Lavrov-Interview with the RBK TV channel
- 253) 2015-07-24-Medvedev-Interview with Slovenian radio and television company RTV Slovenija
- 254) 2015-07-25-Medvedev-Interview with Slovenian newspaper Delo
- 255) 2015-07-27-Putin-Interview with Swiss media
- 256) 2015-08-24-Lavrov-Article for Rossiyskaya Gazeta and Renmin Ribao
- 257) 2015-09-01-Lavrov-Speech at MGIMO University
- 258) 2015-09-01-Putin-Interview to TASS and Xinhua news agencies
- 259) 2015-09-04-Putin-First Eastern Economic Forum
- 260) 2015-09-13-Lavrov-Interview with Voskresnoye Vremya TV programme
- 261) 2015-09-15-Putin-CSTO summit
- 262) 2015-09-23-Medvedev-Article The new reality Russia and global challenges
- 263) 2015-09-29-Lavrov-Interview with the "Russia Today" TV channel
- 264) 2015-09-29-Putin-Interview to American TV channel CBS and PBS
- 265) 2015-10-02-Lavrov-Interview with Venezuelan state television
- 266) 2015-10-12-Putin-Interview to Rossiya-1 television channel
- 267) 2015-10-13-Lavrov-Interview with NTV
- 268) 2015-10-15-Lavrov-Remarks at Government Hour at the State Duma
- 269) 2015-10-16-Putin-Meeting of the CIS Council of Heads of State
- 270) 2015-10-17-Medvedev-Interview with Rossiya TV
- 271) 2015-10-22-Putin-Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club
- 272) 2015-10-24-Lavrov-Interview with Saturday news show Vesti v Subbotu
- 273) 2015-11-05-Putin-World Congress of Compatriots
- 274) 2015-11-11-Medvedev-Interview with Rossiiskaya Gazeta
- 275) 2015-11-13-Putin-Interview to Interfax and Anadolu
- 276) 2015-11-19-Lavrov-Interview with Radio Rossii
- 277) 2015-11-25-Lavrov-Interview with Russian and foreign media
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- 5) 2003-06-22-Gül-Speech at Extraordinary meeting of the WEF
- 6) 2003-07-03-Gül-Speech at the Royal Institute of International Affairs
- 7) 2003-07-25-Gül-Speech at the Washington Institute for Near Eastern Policy
- 8) 2003-09-24-Gül-Speech at the Eurasia Summit of 2003
- 9) 2003-09-26-Gül-Speech at the 58th General Assembly of the United Nations
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- 11) 2004-01-26-Erdoğan-Speech at the Council on Foreign Relations
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- 13) 2004-04-04-Gül-Speech at the Maastricht School of Management
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- 45) 2007-10-25-Babacan-Speech at 17th Meeting of the BSEC Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs
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- 48) 2008-01-16-Babacan-Speech at closing session of the first Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations
- 49) 2008-02-09-Erdoğan-Speech at the 44th Munich Conference on Security Policy
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10.3 Interview questions

The interviews with academics, think tank analysts and policy makers in Russia and Turkey were semi-structured. In each interview I asked the same set of questions, while leaving room for the interlocutor to guide the interview in his or her preferred direction. Below is the list of standard questions which were used in every interview.

10.3.1 Russia

- Is Russia a Eurasian country?
- What is Russia's position in Eurasia?
- How is Eurasia defined?
- What does Eurasia mean for Russia? How important is Russia being Eurasian for the country?
- Does Russia see itself as the centre of Eurasia? Are there competitors or other powers in Eurasia? What is Russia's relationship with Turkey in the context of Eurasia?
- What are Russia's principal interests and stakes in Eurasia?
- What is the importance of the following elements in Russia's conception of Eurasia: geography; security considerations; cultural and ethnic ties; history?
- What is the influence of Eurasian(ist) ideas on policy?
- Is Eurasia an exclusive concept?

- How is Eurasian integration related to other concepts (e.g. OBOR; EU; Greater Europe)?

10.3.2 Turkey

- Is Turkey a Eurasian country?
- What is Turkey's position in Eurasia?
- How is Eurasia defined?
- What does Eurasia mean for Turkey? How important is Turkey being Eurasian for the country?
- Does Turkey see itself as the centre of Eurasia? Are there competitors or other powers in Eurasia? What is Turkey's relationship with Russia in the context of Eurasia?
- What are Turkey's principal interests and stakes in Eurasia?
- What is the importance of the following elements in Turkey's conception of Eurasia: geography; security considerations; cultural and ethnic ties; history?
- What is the influence of Eurasian(ist) ideas on policy?
- What is the relationship between Eurasia and other geopolitical concepts (e.g. Neo-Ottomanism, Europeanisation)? Are they in competition?